UNIT 12 DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF MATERIAL

Structure

12.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Highlight the modalities of relief material management and distribution;
- Understand various types of relief activities and planning required for relief operations; and
- Explain the process of relief in detail, including issues like logistics.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Relief means meeting the immediate needs for food, clothing, shelter and medical aid for disaster victims. It provides assistance to save lives and alleviate suffering in the hours, days and weeks following a disaster. For high impact rapid onset disasters like earthquakes, relief operations have to be launched at very short notice and at very large scale. For creeping disasters like droughts the relief period may prolong to months or even years. The two-dominant/critical issues in relief distribution are politicisation of relief and the problem of 'scarcity amidst plenty'. In this Unit, there shall be an endeavour to understand the two problems and explore ways to evolve a better mechanism of relief distribution/procurement by understanding of constraints in the present arrangements.

12.2 STEPS IN RELIEF DISTRIBUTION

- **Planning for Relief Distribution**

Keeping in mind the panic that arises during any disaster, it is essential to plan before hand to ensure that the distribution of relief material in the immediate aftermath of a disaster is efficient and effective. An effective relief operation is more realistic if correlated with an efficient disaster preparedness plan. Every major disaster's impact could be

contained effectively to a certain extent and the loss minimised if a good preparedness plan is in force. Given below are some of the steps that should be taken before the disaster.

1) Establishment of Early Warning Systems

Science and technology in India have advanced and developed considerably to a state whereby early warnings in case of disasters like floods and cyclones are a reality. All agencies involved in disaster relief operations should monitor the information discharged by the early warning system and should be in touch with the concerned government agencies at regular intervals for up-to-date information on the setting-in and the progress of disasters like cyclones and floods. This would facilitate relief agencies to get prepared and ready for effective disaster relief operations. Agencies working in the areas should monitor the updates from the forecasting and warning agencies and should pass the information on to the others.

2) Liaison at the District Administration Level

Liaison with the various concerned departments at the district level in the disaster-prone areas prior to the manifestation of the disaster would open up better opportunity for the coordination, preparedness and relief operations. Coordination with the local government agencies is very essential for an effective operation and for the related formalities. A healthy relation with the government departments would also ensure the possibility to avail the infrastructure back up available with them. Entry into a disaster zone, if declared prohibited due to some reasons, would be easy if a healthy and positive relation is maintained with the district administration and they are aware of the credentials and capabilities of the organisation.

3) Planning with the "population-at-risk"

Planning with the 'population- at- risk' is very important in disaster preparedness and relief activities. This would enable the identification of the local resources, capabilities and existing facilities of the target or hit-areas. An interaction with the 'population- at- risk' would also generate a confidence in them to play a positive role in the relief operations in the aftermath of a disaster. A positive attitude thus generated within the population itself would contribute towards the disaster preparedness. It would also enable the planning of an effective relief operation, should the need arise.

4) List of Contact Persons

List of contact persons is an important element of disaster relief preparedness. List of responsible people from various concerned fields of operation in the probable disaster zones will help the coordination of the post-disaster activities there. Most of the relief agencies that rush to the disaster areas find it difficult to establish themselves during the first few days. Local contacts will enable a smooth entry to the disaster zone. The list of contact persons may be drawn from local emergency organisations, nodal government officials, non-governmental and community based organisations, prominent citizens of the locality who are interested in the issue, or those who are employed or involved with educational, religious and social service organisations.

5) Pre-Stocking

Pre-stocking of relief materials is always useful in making relief operations effective immediately. Pre-stocking will avoid the last minute rush to procure the materials, which

invariably would be in short supply after a disaster and will require time to procure, pack and transport. Materials for pre-stocking may include food grains, blankets, basic medical supplies, clothing, utensils, tents and other back-up equipment.

6) **Alternate Routes**

Alternate routes for the movement of the relief materials form other parts of the district, state or country into the disaster zone should be well worked out in advance. There is a chance that the direct route linking the disaster site with the regional centres would be cut off or else choked with traffic of outbound survivors or inbound relief teams. Continuous supply chain of the relief materials to the field teams is very critical and must be ensured through back-up routes.

7) **Training And Education**

Training and education is a very important component for ensuring sound disaster relief preparedness that will help make relief operations efficient. Training and education is essential both for the population 'at- risk' and the implementing personnel. The training and education aspect will have to be of a continuing nature to keep the system operational at its most efficient level at all times by keeping people reminded of their roles and by training and educating any new people that join at any time.

8) **Mapping**

Mapping is useful for coordination as it provides spatial distribution of information items including hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities. Maps should be prepared and maintained in an updated state in advance, with the following information marked on them:

- Hazards
- Natural features
- Settlement details with housing and other activity areas
- Vulnerable areas (high density, poor buildings, low-lying, etc.)
- Availability of materials
- Communication routes: Road/Rail/Air/Water
- Alternate routes
- Areas for evacuation
- Locations for potential relief camp sites
- Source/alternate source for water/food
- Location for warehousing/facilities

The Maps may be prepared at the following levels:

- Village/neighbourhood level
- Taluk /mandal/ town level
- District level

- State level
- Zonal level
- National level
- Time Factor

Time factor is an important aspect to be considered in an immediate disaster relief operation. An effective relief operation should be launched within hours and may need to continue for up to a few weeks, depending on the intensity of the disaster. A speedy operation would be more beneficial to the disaster victims since their very life and survival is at stake after a disaster.

12.3 TYPES OF PROGRAMMES AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

I) Feeding Programmes

Feeding programmes aim to provide individuals with free food to make up the difference between supplies at hand and basic needs. Where feeding is considered necessary for particular population groups, it may be provided in the form of cooked meals or dry rations. In practice, if feeding is necessary at all, an integrated package of measures should be envisaged, which is appropriate to local socio-economic situation as well as observed nutritional needs. The very clear separation, which is often made between general, and supplementary feeding, may not always be appropriate. The feeding programme, either the distribution of dry ration or arrangements for the distribution of cooked food, should be limited to the shortest possible duration. The duration may be ten days to fifteen days after the onset of disasters like floods and cyclones. For drought, a different strategy may be adopted, whereby a long-term food support programme may be necessary.

There are three types of feeding:

- *General Feeding*: Basic food/meals are provided for all members of all households within particular population groups affected by the disaster. Locally available food and which is more acceptable is provided. General feeding can be of two types: (1) Distribution of dry ration, (2) Distribution of cooked food.
- *Supplementary Feeding*: Additional food is given to select nutritionally vulnerable individuals to compensate for specific deficiencies. Usually, supplementary feeding is given to children and expectant/lactating mothers. Supplementary feeding can be in the nature of distributing high-energy biscuits/cakes or powder mix. However, proper instructions for the consumption or dosage should be well explained to the beneficiaries before distributing the same.
- *Therapeutic Feeding:* This type of feeding is usually undertaken for nutritional rehabilitation. Special intensive feeding is provided under close medical supervision for severely mal-nourished persons, usually children and old persons.

II) Distribution of Dry Ration

Distribution of dry ration is suitable where the disaster victims can cook themselves. It is also good since it involves the beneficiaries and keeps them busy instead of their sitting

idle and thinking of their trauma. It is better that the distribution is limited to ten to fifteen days' ration. Taking the logistic considerations, it is advisable that the ration quantity for the whole intended period is given to the victims at a time.

The procedure for the distribution may be as follows:

- Survey door-to-door in the target area/village and distribute tokens to each household against their acknowledgement on the beneficiaries list;
- Seek the help of local level government and local leaders while surveying. This will help eliminate duplications and identify the genuine beneficiaries;
- Ask the beneficiaries to collect the ration against production of the token handed over to them, collectively from the distribution point at an appointed time and place;
- Ensure that the distribution is made in the presence of a local government worker deputed by the District Administration. This is to facilitate transparency with the community as well as government authorities;
- Enforce strict crowd management while distribution takes place. If necessary seek the assistance of police;
- Distribution sites may be a public institution in the area, centrally located or the base camp office.

III) **Distribution of Cooked Food**

Logistic and management problems are more while attempting the distribution of cooked food to the disaster victims. It is always a healthy practice if victims themselves can organise the cooking and distribution process for their community. Distribution of cooked food should be resorted to only when there is no capacity in the families to cook their food, and it should be continued for the shortest possible time. The procedure may be as follows:

A) *Where community cooking/feeding is possible:*

- Organise the disaster victims to formulate a committee and assess the food/cooking requirements for the community to be fed;
- Concentrate on simple diet consisting of food items that are easily available in the market or at least in the district headquarters;
- Assess the number of days for which food aid is necessary and supply the community with at least 5 to 7 days of food stock and cooking requirements at a time;
- Cooking vessels may be purchased and provided to the committee. The community may use these vessels in the future for common purposes;
- Enforce strict supervision in regard to hygiene during cooking of the food and its distribution. Enforce discipline and crowd management systems;
- Ensure availability of good drinking water and maintain all sanitary/hygiene aspects in the kitchens;
- Open the kitchen for feeding at pre-determined timings only; and

- Food to be cooked should be on a thorough calculation of the required quantity in order to avoid wastage.

B) *Where community cooking and feeding is not possible:*

- Cook the food in a central kitchen and transport the same to the community;
- Food may be transported in bulk in vessels and distributed to the victims in the vessels they bring;
- Ensure that the vessels used for transportation of the food are properly closed during the transportation to avoid contamination;
- Also ensure that the vessels the beneficiaries bring to collect the food are clean. If necessary, arrange a drum with water to wash them before collecting their food;
- The food may be packed into required packets and the packets transported to the community and distributed to each individual;
- Seek the assistance of the community representatives in the cooking, transportation and distribution process;
- Cooked food should be distributed at the earliest to the beneficiaries, to avoid spoilage and bacterial contamination. It should be ensured that the beneficiaries consume the food soon;
- If packed in individual packets, the packets should be of good quality material and packing done in very clean environment;
- Every food packet should have a uniform quantity of food, as per planned ration rate;
- It is always advisable to prepare one type of food, avoiding varieties in order to help easy management of cooking process. However, it should be a different type of food at the next distribution round;
- Records have to be maintained as to how many people benefited from the feeding; a beneficiary list may be developed.

IV) **Distribution of Standard Relief Material**

Post-disaster material distribution should be very appropriate and need based. Instead of doing many rounds and giving random items on ad-hoc basis, complete family kits should be prepared and distributed in one go. One standard relief set usually consists of the following materials:

- Clothes for adult male and female, appropriate to local climate and culture;
- Clothes for male and female children, appropriate to local climate and culture;
- Mats and blanket/bed-sheets depending on local weather;
- Basic utensils for cooking, storing and eating;
- Tent or tarpaulin if needed;
- Dry rations to last for two weeks;

- Essential commodities like torch, footwear, storage bags;
- Soap, and toiletries based on needs and local practices; locally appropriate materials for women's sanitary needs; and
- Special provisions for families with infants.

All the above items are packed into one set and handed over to each household. The distribution process may be as follows:

- All the affected families in the selected disaster area should be considered for the relief assistance, irrespective of caste, creed and religion.
- The distribution process should not be influenced by religious or political motivations.
- Staff and volunteers will do door-to-door survey of the area affected by the disaster.
- Assistance of the local officer and local leaders/elders should be sought while undertaking the survey. Identification of the beneficiaries along with the help of local leaders will eliminate possible duplications and identify the genuine victims. It will also avoid complaints of biases.
- If there are doubts or complaints, names of the beneficiaries should be verified with the latest voters-list or with the village/municipal list at the village/municipal/ district office.
- In cases where the group is very large or confusion is anticipated in the distribution process, a distribution token system should be used. After verification of the name of the beneficiary, her/his name should be written in the beneficiaries list with all the particulars required therein. Her/ his signature should be obtained in the list against her/ his name and a serially numbered token issued. The token should be countersigned by the issuing officer.
- The beneficiary should be requested to collect the relief packet from the distribution point at the pre-determined time against token issued to him/her.
- At the distribution point, the relief packet should be issued or released to the beneficiary against the token produced. The token may be collected and cancelled to avoid double distribution against one token.
- As a general policy, either all equally deserving victims at a distribution center should get relief, or none of them.

V) **Distribution of Other Material**

Materials, other than the standard relief packets also could be distributed, provided:

- Material or item to be distributed is identified as needed and vital for survival
- Materials are available in the market to avoid delay in supply
- Logistic arrangements are made for procurement, delivery and distribution within the shortest possible time frame.

The distribution procedures could be the same as in the distribution of the standard relief packets.

Distribution Procedures

Time

Relief distribution should be carried out at the earliest possible, after the disaster. The first seventy-two hours are most critical for the community to survive due to exposure, injuries etc. This is the time within which they may need material support to cope with the shock. However, there may also be some local resources like retrieved items and local aid that may support them with food and basic items for this duration, and these may run out after the first two or three days. Hence, essential commodities should reach immediately, and longer-term material aid should reach within seventy-two hours. When following the token system for distribution, material should be distributed to the beneficiaries within twenty-four hours of the distribution of the tokens to them. If there is too much of a time gap, the beneficiaries may lose their tokens. This is likely since they are living in ruins or make shift camps in times of crisis and confusion.

Point

The distribution point may be sited in a convenient location. It is always better to fix the distribution point at a public place like a school or a community centre. Distribution for one or more nearby villages or hamlets or urban neighbourhoods may be arranged in one place. This would avoid transportation of the materials to various centres and thus save considerable time and money. However, the selected place should be within walking distance from all target-settlements.

Process

At the completion of the survey, the number of sets that are to be distributed would be known. The supplier agency office is then informed about the requirement of the materials, the point of distribution and time, through a material requisition form. Once the distribution decision is finalised, the following tasks need to be carried out:

- At the appointed/ fixed time, the required quantity of relief materials should reach the distribution point. Logistics for the same are to be organised systematically when there is more than one distribution point;
- The token holders or the beneficiaries should queue up and collect the materials against production of the tokens at the distribution points;
- Material or the relief packet should be handed over to the beneficiaries against the collection of the token. The token is then cancelled to avoid reuse of the same to collect the relief packet again;
- The collected tokens should then be counted and verified against the beneficiaries list and the number of packets distributed;
- After the distribution is over, the beneficiaries list should be verified once again, and the distributing officer or staff and local elder or leader as a witness, sign over it, declaring that the materials have been distributed. The representative of the local government revenue department also signs as a witness of the process; and
- This list is then produced at the local government revenue office and a distribution/ utilisation certificate obtained from the officer-in-charge.

12.4 LOGISTICS

Logistics is the practical art of supplying material support to a defined group of beneficiaries. Supplies and food aid must be delivered to the beneficiaries who are often located in remote geographical areas. Local transportation and communication infrastructures may have to be reinforced and a process of control and information feedback must be introduced to ensure that the material supplies reach the beneficiaries at the destination in the quantity and quality provided/prescribed. The field logistics systems must deal with the linear flow of material assistance from the origin to the final destination. It involves the transportation of supplies and their storage at key transit points, with control throughout the system until they are finally distributed to the beneficiaries.

Components of Logistics System

The necessary hardware to move and store the goods, including transport fleet, rail wagons, boats, barges, airplanes or other transport units, warehouses and other storage facilities constitute the relief logistics system. In addition, the following things are also covered:

- Records and reports to control the flow of goods through the system, including dispatch challans, requisitions, release orders, issue vouchers, take over certificates, stock registers, stock control cards, receiving reports and distribution reports.
- Personnel to monitor the system by conducting checks and inspections to manage and supervise the operation at key control points, and adequate support staff.
- When material is obtained locally, suppliers should deliver them to the control point in the logistics system nearest the location where the goods will be needed. In this way, local supplies into the main logistics system can be controlled from the receiving point also.

Considerations in Logistics Planning

Development of a planning formula for estimating future overall supply is needed. The system may not be designed to react to only the immediate needs, so it should be known where the system would be needed and for how long. The following issues need to be kept in mind:

- Plan alternate routes for transportation in case of local disruption such as destruction or collapse of roads and bridges.
- The logistics system should be simplified in order to reduce transit time, to minimise the number of stops and transfers and to consolidate facilities.
- Locating warehouses centrally in the areas they intend to serve.
- Maintaining of buffer stocks. Enough supplies should be kept available to meet the needs when logistics operation cannot keep up with demand.
- Contingency plans should be made before the situation arises. Development of alternate routes and readiness should start using them as soon as the problem is evident on the primary route. It is imperative to have alternate routes planned in order to avoid disruption in the delivery.

Transport by Road

When moving supplies inland, trucks generally provide greater flexibility than rail wagons, water barges, boats or aircrafts in terms of capacities, scheduling and routing. Depending on whether destinations can be reached by road or track, appropriate vehicle selection is determined by:

- The condition of the terrain and weather that will be encountered *en route;*
- The nature and quantity of goods to be transported;
- The time-frame and frequency of each trip and the duration of the supply requirement at particular destination;
- The availability of fuel, spare parts and servicing facilities;

Drivers transporting supplies should check their load carefully to ensure that the quantities and condition of the cargo coincide exactly with the information in the dispatch -challan. Otherwise they may be held responsible for damage or shortage. The receiver of the shipment must sign the truck challan to acknowledge delivery. Any loss or damage should be noted on the challan, indicating that the carrier is held liable for such losses.

Transport by Rail

If an adequate rail network exists between the disaster site and the place of procurement, rail is usually the cheapest alternative, especially for transporting large bulky consignments such as food. Whereas trucking rates vary with changing market conditions, rail rates are usually fixed for the given period. However, rail terminals and depots are rarely located exactly where they are needed. Rail transportation usually also requires road transportation at both ends to pick the material from its origin and deliver it to the distribution point.

Transport by Water

Navigable waterways often go where there are no rail and road routes, and the only remaining option is expensive airlifting of supplies or moving beneficiaries to the more accessible location. Relief supplies to small islands mostly have to be transported by boats.

Selecting this mode of transport depends on:

- Existing practices and current use of waterways;
- Availability of cargo carrying boats, their number, capacity and state of condition;
- Availability of personnel to handle boats;
- Docking facilities and personnel at the point of departure and destination for mooring and for handling, storing and transporting the cargo;
- Documentation requirements and permits to carry the cargo;
- Constraints and seasonal considerations;
- Cost and contractual options; and
- Availability of necessary insurance coverage.

Transport by Air

Aircraft are the fastest, most reliable means of transport, but airlifting supplies is expensive, and should only be considered as a last resort, when supplies are urgently needed in a location where no other solution is feasible. Transport by air may be used to supplement land or water transportation where the disaster site is geographically vast and land routes or waterways are long. Air transport is used for movement of high priority personnel and high value, low-volume supplies. In emergencies, airlifting may be an initial response to the situation, but funds are better spent providing the means to move much larger quantities of supplies using other modes of transport.

12.5 PROBLEMS IN RELIEF ADMINISTRATION

Problem of Over-Response

Though recent trends show an increased availability of resources for disaster response, it is not so for all disasters and for all aspects of disaster management. The belief that there were increasing resources available for disaster management was based on the outpouring of resources in the immediate aftermath of the South Asian Tsunami of December 2004. In the following months, the resources that flowed from all parts of the world broke all previous records of funding for disaster response, and also for the first time, the amounts from private sources exceeded government funding for disaster relief. However, this was an exceptional event and thus it prompted exceptional response. In the following months, when hurricane Katrina, a devastating tropical cyclone, hit New Orleans or when a killer earthquake hit the Kashmir region, the extent of response from the world donor community was far less. It must thus be carefully considered that resources will normally be far less than required, and therefore, careful planning and execution is needed for mobilising and utilising them in the event of emergencies.

Disasters are generally understood as events, which occur in the face of inadequate coping/response activity on the part of the sufferers. There are five main reasons that explain the problem of over-response during disasters (Training programme, 2002, Lucknow):

- The resources surviving in the disaster stricken community are greater than expected.
- People react to disasters with a spirit of concern and generosity. Assuming that disasters are deficient and the community is incapacitated; outsiders send resources into the disasters area in large amounts even if they have not been specifically requested.
- The determination of responsibility and establishment of procedures for assessing the overall resources needed are often neglected.
- Because of lack of clearly defined contact points, absence of compatible radio frequencies, non-functional or overloaded telephone circuits, and communication overload, it is often difficult for those offering help to contact someone who can tell them whether or not they are needed. Assuming that it is almost certain that help is needed and that too many resources are better than too few, they choose in favour of responding.
- It is often difficult for the recipients of unsolicited response to refuse it.

Problem of Scarcity amidst Plenty

Well-targeted relief, however, can provide a secure platform from which the disaster-affected can begin the slow process of recovery. Most of the development relief is ill-directed and too much. There are instances of corruption as well. It is now felt that instead of unplanned relief, relief could be administered with long-term resilience in view, which mandates honest and transparent administration.

Red Cross 'developmental relief' in Orissa, for example, included distributing saline-resistant seeds (plus the tools, fertilizers and agricultural training needed to make them grow) and promoting disaster-resistant housing for the most vulnerable. Communities themselves selected who should receive a 'model' house and villagers were taught how to construct them by skilled local masons. Rather than courting donors and governments, humanitarian organisations must advise and inform them, lead them to where the need is greatest, argue the case for assistance, and mobilise public opinion simultaneously. If donor or host government interest is misguided, agencies must be honest and courageous enough to say so (Sparrow, 2001).

Plugging the leaks means paying for labour and resources locally, instead of buying in ready made replacement infrastructure, housing and services from outside contractors. Plans for disaster recovery need to be employment-rich and locally rooted, rather than relying on flying in aid from abroad. Small, locally-based enterprises will be at the heart of rebuilding infrastructure and services. They also help absorb and retain incoming financial assistance.

If all the aid going into a post-disaster region is spent on externally supplied goods, services and consultants, then new money will quickly leave the area. If it is spent on services that are locally supplied, then aid will continue to circulate in the local economy.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (*in The Economist, 2005*) has made the following recommendations to donors, especially logistics companies to make relief a viable enterprise:

- The organisation structure of most agencies involved in disaster reduction efforts suggests that relief and development are two divorced activities. That should be suitably remedied to promote integration of the two functions/divisions.
- Innovation should be promoted in reporting and evaluation mechanisms, which speaks of a developmental approach.
- Local structures should be strengthened, promoted, and worked through, to avoid antipathy that might possibly arise in case of mismatch.
- Constant learning and development approach should be adopted by all relief agencies with a view to bettering organisational functioning through periodic reviews.

Politicisation of Aid

Commercial and philanthropic interests often clash, which are being exacerbated by globalisation. Impacts of globalisation and climate change are draining recovery resources. Deregulation of investment is making it harder for host countries to keep profits in the place they were created. The poorer and more risk-prone a country is, the higher is the rate of return demanded by investors – up to 30 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, factors boosting disaster resilience (for example, strong health and education, diverse local economies) are undermined by the structural adjustment programmes that

poor nations are encouraged to pursue. These programmes squeeze social-sector resources and concentrate on economic specialisation and primary commodity exports (Simms,2001).

Recent United Nations (UN) research suggests global warming could raise sea-level appreciably, thereby submerging or inundating many major cities. Poorest regions are most at risk, as agricultural yields drop and disasters increase. Estimates for the costs of weather-related disasters over the next 20 years range from US$ 6 trillion to 10 trillion, ten times the likely aid flows. Meanwhile, aid to the world's least developed countries has fallen a third since 1991. The poorest are most exposed to disasters, yet their contributions to warming the atmosphere are negligible. Hence, pulling people out of the poverty spiral is the best safeguard against disaster. Since livelihoods are being threatened by the current tide of globalisation, deregulation and hence, unfair market competition, generating sustianable livelihoods by proactive action in this regard would be the viable answer to the problem. Sustainable livelihoods may even hold the key to peace in war-torn countries. The poorest can best recover from today's disasters and conflicts on the foundations of strong, inclusive and diverse local economies, rather than trusting to the vague promises of the global economy.

Problem of Volunteers

To quote a section from the *World Disasters Report of 2004 as per* Milligan (2004-05);

"Too much help made a mess here," explained one spontaneous helper who drove to Golcuk, Turkey, following the 1999's massive earthquake, which killed 17,000 people. Hoping to bring relief, thousands of 'volunteers' created a 20-mile traffic jam obstructing rescue vehicles and equipment. Four years earlier, an earthquake destroyed much of Kobe in Japan, killing 6,400. The quake prompted over one million Japanese to spontaneously volunteer. Kobe's volunteers organised themselves. But the flood of Turkish helpers overwhelmed emergency services. Coordinating volunteers is a key challenge in rapid-onset disasters.

Rita Chick of the American Red Cross (ARC) says it's essential to match these volunteers with needs in affected areas. Following Hurricane Mitch, some first-time foreign volunteers, lacking language skills or training, were a burden. Local students proved far more useful and saved many lives. Some local Red Cross volunteers responding to recent disasters in Latin America found themselves more vulnerable than those they were helping. Yet they were denied food and plastic sheeting for their homes. Says one delegate: "Because they are volunteers they are treated as second-class victims" *(Chapter 7, World Disasters Report, 2001)."*

This brings to light some of the problems faced with and by volunteers during disaster relief operations. Successful disaster response depends on good volunteer management systems, which include identification, recruitment, retention, involvement and recognition. There are three essential requirements in volunteer management: understand exactly why an organisation needs volunteers; design meaningful volunteer assignments; and elaborate a recruitment strategy. When the disaster is over, they leave. To retain volunteers, organisations must recruit them to other, more permanent tasks. Attracting volunteers means showing people a pressing need and how they can make a difference. Retaining them requires ongoing training, strong supervision, feedback and recognition.

12.6 CONCLUSION

Disasters strike with little or no warning. They leave destruction, suffering and turmoil in their wake. The survivors need immediate support in terms of physical assistance and relief material. For efficient relief distribution, advance planning and preparedness is a must. There should be early warning systems, liaison with the government, involvement of the community, local contact lists, identified alternate routes and basic training and education to the local support personnel or volunteers. Distribution can include feeding programmes, distribution of dry rations and distribution of cooked food. Under non-food items there are standard relief kits comprising essential commodities for families. If the need is felt for other items, these are also distributed depending on the capacity of the relief agencies. The relief distribution procedure has to take into account issues of timing, distribution methodology, and location. Relief logistics is a highly systematic process of ensuring smooth transportation of personnel and handling of relief material from its point of procurement to the point of distribution.

12.7 KEY CONCEPTS

Food distribution : Food is an essential requirement in the immediate aftermath of disasters as home and essential requirements are all 'under siege', be it war or natural disasters. Maintaining uninterrupted food supply is the most important requirement in the post disaster situation, as on it depends the number of people who will survive the difficult time.

Logistics : Logistics involves materials management, including procuring, supplying and distributing goods. Logistics is an essential aspect of disaster management. Two of the widely accepted definitions are given below:

"The organisation of any project or operation, including transportation and housing, for example, the warehousing of goods as they are being transferred from one country to another (www.scottish-enterprise.com/sedotcom_home/help/help-glossary.htm)".

"The management of both inbound and outbound materials, parts, supplies, and finished goods. Includes such activities as; production scheduling, forecasting, customer service, order entry, inventory control, and product allocation among customers" (www.crowley.com/glossary/default.asp).

Non-food items : Non-food items include, clothing, medical supplies and other essential items like blankets, heaters, and tents, etc., which are necessary for disasters resilience.

Population at risk : Population at risk depends on vulnerable segments that are at relative greater risk due to physical or socio economic vulnerability. Certain segments may be

more pone to suffer illnesses like malaria, dengue etc. because of their physical location and poor socio-economic status.

Standard Relief Kits : Standard relief kits contain certain minimum essential items requirements that are commonly applicable in case of any/every kind of disaster, for example, common drugs, such as antibiotics, pain killers, first aid equipment such as cotton wool ointments for dressing wounds, vaccines for inoculation against diseases etc.

12.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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12.9 ACTIVITIES

1) Considering that you have to plan a relief operation for an earthquake hit area with 50 families in one village, draw a flowchart of activities that will need to be done to complete a successful relief operation of two weeks duration. It must start from the initial assessment of the area up to the final distribution of relief material.

2) For your village or neighbourhood, prepare a map and put the following information on it:

   - Natural features
   - Vulnerable pockets (buildings and areas that are more likely to get affected in terms of building damage, water logging, fire, etc.)
   - Availability of relief materials (markets, places of worship, community centres)
   - Access routes from outside
   - Alternate routes
   - Possible locations for relief material storage sites
   - Possible locations for relief distribution sites.