

Collective Efforts of People to Reduce the Impact of Climate Change in Sundarban, India: a Study

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The impact of disaster in south Asia has increased in last couple of decades. However changing climate is a major cause of disaster, daily difficulties of people in these areas are not different from disaster situation. Therefore, they find alternatives to manage the daily uncertainties of life and crisis of livelihood.

While the researchers concentrate on the impact of disaster on vulnerable people, it is important to see the ability of these people and their knowledge and perception against the disaster. The need of these people varies with their perception, experience and knowledge about the impact. Therefore it becomes priority for researchers to concentrate on the strategies of people and their ability in order to understand the impact of natural hazards.

I have been studying on disaster management in Sundarban region which is highly vulnerable to flood due to rising sea level. Embankment surrounded the islands beaches due to rapid land erosion at river bank which forces people to shift towards interior part of village. Breaching embankment and saline water floods cause loss of landmass and natural resources and also affects on local livelihood in the village. As the rate of land erosion is so high, reconstruction of embankment becomes expensive. Sometimes government also denies to provide support to protect villages from floods and land erosion. Though there are difficulties, people do not leave the place because they have seen the difficulties of their neighbours who have become environmental refugee. Therefore, people of frequently flood affected villages take their own efforts and strategies to avoid the impact of floods. They adopt their traditional skill and strategies before getting any support from the government and non-governmental organization. They also understand that individual efforts are not sufficient to avoid the increased magnitude of floods caused by tidal waves at the coastal areas. However they do not understand the concept of climate change, they experience its impact by loosing agricultural land, loss of fresh water, livelihoods activities and uncertainty of life. They also understand their individual incapability to reduce the impacts of saline water flood caused by rising sea level. Therefore, affected villagers take collective efforts and strategies to reduce the impacts of floods and to meet their needs. The collective efforts also help them to negotiate with the government to meet their demand in reducing the impacts of disaster. The ethnographic studies in Sundarban villages have found that villagers able to avoid the flood risk and solve the chronic flood problem in village. They also collectively initiate a movement against the government to meet their demand and needs to reduce the impacts of chronic floods impacts in the village.

It is found that the individual efforts and strategies adopted by the government and people are not adequate to respond to increasing impact of natural hazards. However individual efforts and strategies get success for short period of time, it can not be the solution. The solution will come while people take efforts collectively in order to reduce the uncertainty which is supported by the government.

Key words: Collective Efforts, Disaster, Climate Change, Sundarban, Environmental Refugee