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# Dealing with Disasters

Capacity Building Toolkit for National  
Civil Society Organisation Platforms

**CASE  
STUDY**

**3**

**India: Influencing  
institutions and  
strengthening  
communities**



## India: Influencing institutions and strengthening communities

India is a global leader in development of Disaster Management Policy. Nevertheless, much of this progress has been in disaster response rather than resilience building through disaster risk reduction. The experience of CSO Platforms, operating both nationally and locally, highlights the need to strengthen connections from policy at institutional level to action at local level.

### Context

The scale and severity of intensive disasters striking India led to it become, in May 2016, the first country in the world to launch a National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP).<sup>28</sup> In addition to this, many states have developed their own State and District Disaster Management Plans.

Nevertheless, studies suggest the emphasis is still on response rather than risk reduction. They highlight the need to capitalise on community level capacities, complementing 'top down' institutional responses with 'bottom up' local capacities.

### Case study contributors

VANI is a large and well established National CSO Platform and a Forus member, with over 10,000 CSO members. It engages with the lower level of State Networks and through them down to local CSOs and the reverse. VANI focuses on the regulatory framework within which CSOs function alongside government, private sector and academics. The Platform aims to work towards achieving holistic development, SDG integration, and the creation of an enabling environment, through cooperation between government, CSOs, and the private sector.<sup>29</sup>

Website: <https://www.vaniindia.org/>

UDYAMA, (meaning 'a steady walk'), has a local perspective, emphasising 'community resilience'. Though involved in response, for example in the monsoons and cyclones striking Orissa annually, it regards long-term community development as critical in reducing the impact of disasters. It participates in GNDR Views from the Frontline action research. This assesses factors affecting peoples' lives and their needs and priorities in strengthening their resilience.

They state their role as being 'focused on strengthening the local community with local-specific development communication, capability building exercises and participatory tools on community resilience'.

Website: <https://www.udyama.org/>

### Focus on: India

When disaster strikes, VANI acknowledges that local CSOs and local communities are first responders. They give the example of the Kerala cyclone. This event didn't initially attract international attention, as Kerala is seen as a relatively developed state. Due to the scale of the emergency, however, national and international NGOs became involved. VANI's role was not as a conduit for financial support, but it made linkages. In the case of the Kerala cyclone, it linked CSOs with national and international NGOs, as well as with business and donors. These see VANI as a credible and trustworthy link to reliable CSO partners. In the Indian context this financial 'matchmaking' is increasingly important as VANI finds that fewer INGOs are active.

VANI also plays an important communications role from their membership to government, as government planning processes are often flawed. CSOs at the frontline are under resource pressure and need the support of VANI to

communicate information and advocacy, as well as to access resources.

UDYAMA highlights the complexity of disasters. For example, the Orissa cyclones and coastal flooding led to distress migration and in turn to increased vulnerability through loss of livelihoods, of income, and of assets. In hill country, however, the contrasting challenge is drought.

The localised understanding of disasters which UDYAMA accumulates leads to their emphasis on integrating developmental actions, rather than simply focusing on response. However, they find that this is not well understood at government level: 'Government is required to support mainstream development process, but sometimes it fails to do this. Effective support starts with local action, based on specific contexts and needs - disaster or drought or community diseases. It is necessary to learn from local contexts. Action and reflection is a basis for developing knowledge used in influencing policy to address community needs.'

UDYAMA recognises that the local action which is their focus needs to be allied to national and international policy influence. 'Global networking and global support are essential to engage civil society and community towards resilience building'.

In response to the Coronavirus crisis, VANI have launched a range of media initiatives<sup>30</sup> and established webinars on themes which include influencing the G20 in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. UDYAMA has raised questions about the future of communities in the wake of the crisis: 'This COVID-19 pandemic crisis has given us a huge opportunity to rethink the way we work, educate our children, and even our cultural customs, and to realign towards social, economic, environmental sustainability'.

## Summary

From both perspectives, top down and bottom up, the complementary activity of these two platforms highlights the necessity to forge strong connections between local level knowledge and advocacy at national level. These connections can influence policy, shaping it to meet local needs more effectively. They also emphasise the need to move beyond response to building livelihood resilience.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>28</sup> NDMP: published by Indian National Disaster Management Authority: <http://pibphoto.nic.in/documents/rlink/2016/jun/p20166201.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.vaniindia.org/admin-latest/images/STRATEGIC%20PLAN%20OF%20VANI%202019-2022.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.vaniindia.org/details.php?id=172>