

Minutes of Meeting
State Inter Agency Group (IAG), West Bengal

Date: 29 May 2009

Time: 16.30 – 18.30 hrs

Venue: Conference Hall, Association of Bengal Collaborators for Development (ABCD), 52-D, Radhanath Choudhury Road, Kolkata – 700 015.

Objective: The State IAG members met for a second time in a gap of 72 hrs to review damage and impacts of AILA in the context of assessment reports from partners, and to plan further for an unified response strategy in relief and emergency response related activities.

Participants: The meeting was participated by several delegates from INGO, NGO and local agencies. The key stakeholders, including ECHO, UNICEF, UNDP, and leading NGOs: CARE India; CARITAS; CRS; WWF, LWSI; Sphere India; OXFAM India; SCF; WBVHA, Goal India, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC); CASA; PRISM, ABCD, SAHAY; Trickle Up; PUS; DRCS; INSS; CINI; RKM; SHAPF; CCK; SKC; SCBR; and several others participated in the meeting.

Key issues discussed:

1. The meeting deliberated on coordination and collaboration among INGOs / NGOs and GOs in information sharing and targeted intervention in the areas affected by AILA.
2. The meeting took a detailed stock of the assessment reports, shared individually by the partners; and the planned responses, which requires all humanitarian agencies to work together, to fill the gaps and to be in great understanding with one another, while upholding each organization's core commitment
3. The participants also discussed on district and block level coordination and information sharing with the GOs and among themselves for identifying gaps and effective response vis-à-vis the identified gaps in our response.

Major Discussion Points :

- The meeting began with the partners standing in silence for a minute, praying for the repose of the souls of those who lost their lives in the cyclone and landslides.
- Ms.Parnasri of UNICEF shared the key discussion points and outcome of the last meeting again with all and briefly discussed regarding the objective of the second meeting i.e., sharing of the assessment, finding out the key gaps, deciding upon the strategy and partnership and plan for action. Ms. Parnasri Ray Choudhury of UNICEF commended the efforts of partners in responding to the natural disaster and invited all partners to share the situation report based on their field visits.
- Mr. George Graham of SCF started the sharing first on assessment on Sandeshkhali-I. However the key issues are entry of saline water and destruction of land and ponds, damage of shelters. The need is to arrange for desalinization and work for immediate relief and sanitation measures.
- OXFAM shared their experience of Namkhana and Patharpratima-immediate need is to desalination and draining arrangement for saline water. Also loss of crops and land need to be taken care of. Water purification, ORS and cleaning of the environment are some of the urgent needs felt by community.

- Mr. Sanjay Rozario from CARITAS informed that they along with CRS and Seva Kendra Calcutta (as partner) made a joint assessment on 28 th for Hingaljanj under North 24 pgs which is severely affected. Out of 9 GP's 5 are worst hit and almost 110,000 population is affected. They met the BDO and got details regarding the damage. The key issues are entire villages has been washed away and people are living on the roadside and trees. Relief has been started by Govt but stock of shelter materials and water pouches are not adequate and they have requested for more. The Government also has limited number of boats which has restricted access and relief operations.
- Fr. Soosaiappan from PUS shared the experience of their visit to Gosaba on 28 th along with UNICEF. He said that the entire block is very badly affected. 2 GP's are still under water as they are close to river. Drinking water is the critical need for people. Water pouches are needed; also water purification measures need to be undertaken. There is also a need for sanitary napkins. People do not want food rather safe shelter and water, he commented.
- WWF shared their experiences in 3 blocks of which they said Gosaba is the most affected. They have arranged for some immediate relief and have arranged for carrying water barrels. Also they said cleaning of environment is very important as carcass of wild and domestic animals are floating.
- SAHAY/CINI-shared their experience on Kultali. Salinity is everywhere and this is leading to the destruction of croplands and ponds. SAHAY, CINI and their partners have distributed water glasses, tarpaulins, halogens and sanitary napkins.
- CARE-T. Shaw shared their experience of Patharpratima, Gosaba and Namkhana. He told that they have met the BDOs and other NGO's of the area. Short term needs are garments, bleaching powder, food for children and desalinization of water bodies. Long term needs are repair of the embankment, shelter and renovation of ponds.
- Mr. Aniruddha of shared his experience on Hingaljanj. He mentioned that Social security is very much needed; need for health sector intervention, more involvement of PHE, lack of kerosene oil—and issues like these are predominantly in the minds of the people. People do not want food because they do not have fuel to cook. The temporary shelter conditions are far from anything adequate. The fact that people do not have crop insurance for lands or crops lost, adds to the woes relating to livelihood.
- Mr. S.B. Saha of CARE India told that Govt. is doing a lot and the task here is to find out the gaps and supplement and complement each other to avoid duplication of resources.
- CRY- mentioned that long term livelihood need is also important apart from the short term requirements.
- Fr. Reginald from SKC shared his experience on Sandeshkhali saying that the action is much more required for the people who need our support. He mentioned that SKC team will find out what further could be done meaningfully rather than duplicating.
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 - Mr. D. Giri of RKM Narendrapur said that RKM is already in field at Sagar, Namkhana and Pathar along with Gosaba and have distributed tarpaulins, hygiene kits and dry foods in the area.

- Ms. Subhrakali Mondal of LWS(I) mentioned that already she has already shared their initial interventions in their report to all through the IAG, and said that the next plan of action will be decided shortly.
- DRCSC-shared that they have undertaken assessment for Patharpratima in south and Hingalganj in North 24 Pdns districts and people are in need of drinking water, safe hygiene and environment. They are in the process of collecting more micro level info from the community.
- Mr. Subhasish Debnath of UNDP informed the members of the new sitrep from the Govt of W. Bengal, and shared that Purba Medinpur and Darjeeling too are badly affected. It was noted that there is no assessment report from any NGOs about the conditions in these districts. Puthumai A. Nazarene mentioned that Anugyalaya in Darjeeling is working on a relief package. If any INGO is willing they could join Anugyalaya for relief operation for the victims of landslides in the hills.
- Ms. Parnasri fom UNICEF again informed that UNICEF works in partnership with NDRF and Govt Health dept. She also mentioned that at present they have several pre-positioning centers across the state from Raigunj to South 24 Pargana, and the materials from places in Nadia and Raiganj are being moved to the cyclone affected areas.
- Speaking on the occasion, Mr Vikrant from Sphere wanted to know whether there is any other agency working on the pre-positioning in the state, OXFAM told that they have one and the items that they support are Tarpaulins, Buckets, Gasoline and life jackets located on Orissa, which they are transporting to West Bengal.
- Mr. Vikrant also proposed that the partners could think in terms of closer collaboration at the District level, may be by having one person nominated as point person for each district. The members felt that since the time for discussion on the issue is short, and that the issue needs further thinking, this issue can be postponed to the next meeting for discussion.
- Kasturi from CRS mentioned that information flow between and amongst partners is very crucial; not just what each organization is doing, but how much and at quality / quantity. Another important area is how best we are complementing the role of the government, and we must ensure that we do not duplicate what the government is doing. As such there should be intimate coordination is essential at the ground level, specially at Block and Panchayat level.
- Some members raised their concern on politicizing relief operations in some places, leading to disruption in relief operations in some areas.
- The role and importance of collaboration with local NGO's was also emphasized by all.
- Mr. Tapan Mahapatra of DIPECHO who was present on the occasion highly praised the efforts of IAG West Bengal right from coming together within 24 hours of Cyclone AILA, making conscious efforts of optimal utilization of resources and compiling information of such high value. He mentioned that it has never been heard of that the UN organizations, INGOs and NGOs are meeting in such a short notice for a unified response strategy and acting with a specific mission. At the end he congratulated all the State IAG members and promised share these best practices with other ECHO partners in the States or the region.

Important Learning :

- * The chart for INGO / NGO mapping for operational area prepared by Puthumai A. Nazarene is very good. This can be supplemented with three more columns on : Thematic Area of Operation, Government Intervention in the area, and Name of the Local Partner, if Any. The Block level mapping as proposed by Ms. Parnasri can be very useful.
- * The INGO / NGO collaboration must be also found in the Panchayat level for effective operation and timely service delivery. This can be achieved either by geographical consolidation of activities among the partners, or, by thematic division of activities.
- * There are still gaps in our operation as practically not many NGOs have started working in Purba Medinipur and Darjeeling hills, besides some of the other affected districts. This gap needs to be paid attention to by all organizations.

Future Plans :

- All partners shall intensify their operations keeping in mind the needs assessment and geographical mapping, and ensure regular flow of information at all levels for effective coordination among all IAG partners, Governmental organizations and non-IAG partners.
- The next meeting will be held 72 hours from now, i.e. **at 16.30 hrs on Monday June 1, 2009 at ABCD, 52-D, Radhanath Choudhury Road, Kol – 15.**