

SUMMARY REPORT



Sphere India
National Coalition of Humanitarian Agencies in India

20th October 2023

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Flash Floods In
Sikkim and West Bengal

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
BACKGROUND	3
SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION POINTS	4
Findings of the Assessment Report.....	4
Overview of the Current Situation In Sikkim	4
Overview of the Current Situation in West Bengal.....	5
Insights and Lessons Learned from the Flash Floods.....	5
Keynote Address	6
General Sharing from the Participants	7
Participants Observations.....	7
Key Action Points	8
ANNEXURE	9
Agenda	9
Registration List	9
Snapshots.....	12
Comprehensive Situation Reports	12
Preliminary Assessments Reports.....	12
Inter-Agency Coordination Committee Meetings	12
Unified Response Strategy (URS) Matrix	12
Recording of the Multi-Stakeholder Consultation.....	12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the wake of a sudden surge in the Teesta River's flow on October 4, 2023, which resulted in extensive damage to infrastructure and impacted multiple districts, Sphere India initiated a rapid and coordinated response. The organization swiftly generated three situational reports, laying the foundation for an effective crisis management approach.

The response effort included convening an emergency inter-agency coordination committee meeting on October 5, attended by IAC members and IAG West Bengal focal persons. This meeting culminated in the activation of the Unified Response Strategy (URS) matrix and the development of a combined preliminary assessment report using secondary informations, data from government departments and assessment reports from the responding agencies. Subsequently, a second IAC committee meeting took place on October 7, which involved local responding agencies. During this meeting, plans were devised to map affected areas using GIS, enhance the preliminary assessment report with detailed information, and reactivate the Sikkim Inter-Agency Group (IAG).

On October 11, the response efforts expanded as additional local actors were involved to collect vital ground-level data and gain insights into the emerging needs of affected communities. These findings culminated in the decision to develop the third version of the preliminary assessment report and organize a multistakeholder consultation with government representatives and other stakeholders.

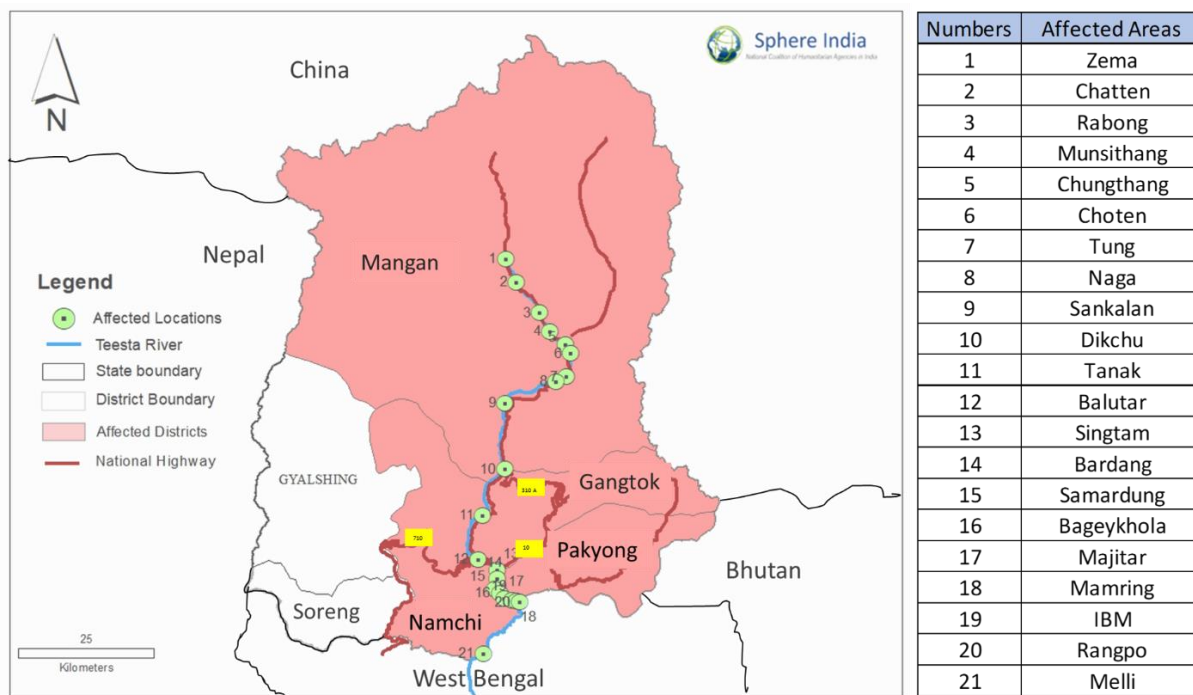
The multistakeholder consultation, held on October 20, witnessed the active participation of diverse stakeholders, including government authorities, responding agencies, academics, professionals, UN agencies, and affected communities. The primary aim of this consultation was to gain a comprehensive understanding of on-ground realities, disseminate the findings of the preliminary assessment, identify and address emerging gaps and challenges, eliminate response duplications, and bolster collaborative efforts in the affected areas. From this meeting, several crucial action points emerged, such as:

1. The Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) is currently emphasising on short-term recovery efforts and will soon share a recovery plan with the group.
2. Furthermore, Sphere India has been requested to consolidate response plans and commitments from various humanitarian agencies in a White Paper to be presented in front of the state authorities to establish a unified response strategy.
3. Strengthen local-level community engagement and preparedness, with a strong emphasis on future disaster mitigation, requiring robust collaboration between government and non-government organizations.
4. Lastly, there is a strong emphasis on producing a balanced and comprehensive report that accurately portrays the impact of the GLOF and the Dam Outburst in both Sikkim and West Bengal, ensuring equal representation of the experiences and challenges in both regions.

This collaborative approach signifies the commitment of the Sphere India network to effectively address the crisis and enhance resilience in the affected regions. With a commitment to addressing the pressing needs of affected communities and enhancing resilience in the region, we are united in our resolve to navigate the challenges presented by this disaster. Through collaboration, information-sharing, and coordinated efforts, we aim to alleviate the suffering of those impacted and contribute to the long-term recovery and stability of the affected areas. As we move forward, our collective strength and unwavering commitment will serve as a beacon of hope in times of crisis.

BACKGROUND

In the early hours of October 4th, 2023, a sudden surge in the Teesta River's flow triggered a flash flood in Teesta River valley. The precise cause of the flash flood remains under scientific investigation, but the primary reason is attributed to a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) event at South Lhonak Lake in North Sikkim. The flash flood has also had a profound impact, extending its consequences to West Bengal's Kalimpong District.



Flood Affected Areas in Sikkim

(Source: Sphere India's Preliminary Assessment Report III– Flood in Sikkim & West Bengal)

In response to this urgent crisis, Sphere India, guided by the Inter-Agency Coordination (IAC) Committee, organized a Multi-Stakeholder Consultation. This gathering aimed to share insights from Preliminary Assessment Reports, present perspectives from State Authorities and various Local and National responding Agencies on the Current Situation, identify existing Gaps and Challenges, and collaboratively devise Recommendations and a Way Forward.

The meeting featured the findings of preliminary assessment reports being presented by Mr. Cyljo Abraham, Deputy Manager – IAC of Sphere India and encouraging input from all participants. Notable contributions were made by Mr. Hemant Kumar, Deputy Director of Bhavishya Bharat, and Mr. Praful Rao, President of Save The Hills, providing insights into the current situation and emerging needs in Sikkim and West Bengal, respectively. Additionally, Mr. Omkar Oniel Khare, Risk and Resilience Specialist of UNICEF Odisha and West Bengal shared valuable insights and lessons learned from the recent flash floods, focusing on resilience building.

Prof. Vinod Kumar Sharma, Vice Chairman of Sikkim SDMA, chaired the meeting and delivered a keynote address outlining the State Government's actions and strategies for future disaster management. Mr. Imran Majid, Program Director at ADRA India, who also serves as the interim Chair of the IAC Committee, moderated the meeting and concluded the meeting by summarising the action points.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION POINTS

Findings of the Assessment Report

Sphere India has been monitoring the situation from the beginning of the incident and has already shared three situation reports and three preliminary assessment reports. Sphere India presented an findings from the assessment report, including the scale of the disaster and the affected areas. Some key points covered are:

- The decisions taken by the IAC Committee meeting were discussed, focusing on the measures and strategies to address the crisis effectively.
- The meeting included a review of the findings from the preliminary assessment report, which highlighted the extent of the damage and the impact on the affected communities.
- Official data indicated that there are 40 casualties and 79 missing persons reported in Sikkim. Additionally, 88,400 people have been affected by the crisis. Around 2,000 houses have been damaged, and the livelihood sector has been severely impacted. Notably, 33 bridges have collapsed, and 15 roads are closed, including NH10.
- The main challenges in northern Sikkim, particularly in areas like Chungthang, revolve around road accessibility.
- The progress of rescue operations was discussed, with 4,782 people successfully evacuated. 16 relief camps being operationalized accommodating 1,423 inmates.
- The use of ZIP lines for delivering food and essential items to cut-off locations was highlighted.
- The meeting noted the gradual return of people from temporary camps, signaling ongoing recovery efforts.
- Various essential requirements for the affected communities were discussed, including medical equipment, food, clean water, shelter materials, hygiene kits, communication devices, portable generators, solar lighting, warm clothing, and trained counselors for emotional support.
- In West Bengal, 389 houses were completely destroyed, and 164 houses were partially damaged. Additionally, five roads are damaged, and 219 households (916 people) are residing in ten relief camps.
- The meeting highlighted the educational impact, with over 300 students unable to commute to Kalimpong for school. One hundred forty-one students are currently staying in camps in the Kalimpong block.
- An overview of government responses, such as the 'Punarwas Awas Yojana,' a Rehabilitation Housing Scheme, was shared.

Overview of the Current Situation In Sikkim

Bhavishya Bharat shared the impact and challenges in Sikkim and their response initiatives, findings, emerging needs, and gaps that they are identifying in the response phase:

- Discussion centered on the challenges faced by isolated villages in high ranges, such as Safoon and Salon Pakkam. Notably, despite their isolation, essential supplies are being delivered via ZIP lines.
- Bhavishya Bharat's efforts were highlighted, covering a total of 10,000 villagers in 15 villages in North Sikkim. Their current response initiatives include setting up community kitchens and medical camps, and distribution of water pipes, generators, and sanitary pads. Additionally, a helpline number was set up to facilitate communication and support coordination.

- Communication and food delivery were identified as major challenges encountered by Bhavishya Bharat during their response efforts.
- The meeting acknowledged the specific needs of the affected population, particularly focusing on the requirements of the elderly. These needs encompass utensils, water, clothing, and, significantly, support for livelihoods

Overview of the Current Situation in West Bengal

Save the Hills shared the impact and challenges in West Bengal and their response initiatives, findings, emerging needs, and gaps that they are identifying in the response phase:

- With the approaching winter season, there is a growing need for blankets and jackets for the inmates in relief camps and affected regions.
- Save the Hills emphasized their active monitoring of weather conditions and sharing real-time updates through WhatsApp groups to ensure timely responses to changing circumstances.
- To gain better clarity on the situation, participants emphasized the importance of understanding the timeline for the water's journey to reach each affected area after the Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) incident.
- The meeting addressed the rising water levels in the Teesta River, which is flowing approximately 10 feet above its normal levels. The presence of debris and continuous erosion along the riverbanks were noted as potential contributing factors.
- The disruption of the transportation system was highlighted as a significant challenge. Access to Siliguri is now primarily through the Pampoor route, which is relatively narrow. While NH10 has not been officially reopened, people are using it for travel, resulting in longer travel times.
- People are gradually returning to their homes. In West Bengal, there are currently 10 relief camps, and participants acknowledged that these camps are now receiving adequate food and basic items.
- The meeting discussed the potential impact of a depression in the Bay of Bengal, which could affect coastal areas of West Bengal and exacerbate the current situation. The storm's predicted approach on October 24th was highlighted.

Insights and Lessons Learned from the Flash Floods

UNICEF India deliberated on their insights and lessons, with a focus on cultivating resilience in the affected regions:

- The meeting discussed instances of slopes being breached in certain areas of northern West Bengal, and the reported occurrence of land subsidence in these regions.
- It was emphasized that development projects in these areas may contribute to land subsidence. The importance of implementing proper mitigation measures, based on thorough studies, was highlighted.
- 32,000 people reside in areas near riverbanks, with some new buildings constructed dangerously close to rivers. The need for local residents to be aware of the river's behavior, vulnerable spots, and precautionary activities was stressed to reduce future impacts.
- The meeting underscored the importance of raising awareness among local communities about the river's dynamics and potential hazards. Building local knowledge can significantly contribute to disaster risk reduction.

- Both engagement with the local administration and community involvement were deemed crucial. Effective collaboration between these two groups is necessary to address the challenges posed by the floods.
- It was noted that the frequency of floods and related incidents has increased. While immediate relief efforts are being effectively managed by the government and local NGOs, the meeting emphasized the need for long-term activities, particularly addressing mental health concerns resulting from these repeated disasters.
- UNICEF has expressed its readiness to provide technical support to SSDMA, emphasizing their commitment to assisting in the response and recovery efforts.

Keynote Address

The State SDMA representative shared an outline of the current situation in Sikkim and the state government's actions and strategies for future disaster management:

- The importance of community members swiftly responding to alert messages was highlighted, as it played a significant role in reducing the disaster's impact. Some areas received water quickly, leaving little time for a response.
- Approximately 80 villages were affected economically. However, due to the effective response to alerts, some villages did not experience any casualties.
- Preparedness, in addition to response, was stressed. NGOs are now placing more emphasis on preparedness and early warning systems to strengthen community resilience.
- There are still around 2,000 people in relief camps, and the need for temporary shelters is growing, especially with winter approaching.
- Communication was identified as a major challenge initially, but it has been restored with the assistance of the army, local residents, and others.
- Many villages avoided casualties due to the sensible behavior of their residents in response to the disaster.
- Local NGOs are working effectively and sincerely on the ground, showcasing the value of collaborative efforts.
- The state government is actively collecting data from the ground, with district collectors effectively monitoring and coordinating. The central government is also closely monitoring the situation.
- SSDMA is in touch with national and international organizations, emphasizing the need for financial support, especially for setting up temporary shelters.
- SSDMA is currently collecting data on the specific requirements, recognizing that obtaining accurate information will take some time.
- The sinking of cities has raised public health concerns, with the potential for disease outbreaks.
- The discussion noted the failure of sensors designed to monitor the volume of the lake during the incident.
- In various sectors, including agriculture, SSDMA is seeking support and expertise from NGOs. NGOs' extensive experience in various types of disasters is considered valuable.
- NDMA is assisting SDMA in both short-term and long-term recovery planning. A post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) will provide further clarity for long-term recovery plans.

- In Sikkim, there is a 1,200-bed hospital currently supported by WHO doctors. The health sector is functioning effectively. However, the primary challenge is the need for temporary shelter, and donors are requested to come forward to address this critical need.
- The meeting noted the importance of facilitating inter-state coordination and recognized the current lack of such coordination activities. Collaboration in this critical situation is encouraged.
- It was emphasized that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be more stringent and rigorously enforced in the Himalayan region to prevent similar disasters in the future.
- The meeting expressed an interest in understanding how humanitarian agencies can provide assistance in various sectors to support the ongoing efforts.

General Sharing from the Participants

- DFY has a dedicated healthcare team already in Sikkim, actively working on healthcare-related efforts.
- Change Alliance is collaborating with local organizations in Sikkim to provide assistance and support in response to the disaster.
- Participants reiterated the importance of strengthening early warning systems for future disaster preparedness.
- A ham radio team of CROPC is actively working in West Bengal to facilitate communication and coordination. The implementation of a digital healthcare system with the necessary equipment is viewed as a potential solution, with CROPC being capable of providing support in this area.
- With the next monsoon approaching in approximately six months, participants emphasized the need to address concerns in the Teesta basin and on NH 10. Sections of the roads have been damaged in various areas, and participants sought information from the government regarding road conditions during the monsoon to ensure public safety.
- Amrita University's study indicated that the danger persists in Sikkim, with glacial ice still present and potentially subject to melting. Participants discussed the importance of mitigating the risks associated with the existing lake containing water and ice.
- The overflow of North Lonak Lake was noted, and Amrita University expressed its readiness to collaborate on both scientific and social aspects to address this issue effectively.

Participants Observations

1. Participants noted the importance of **continually learning from past disasters** and emphasized the need to prepare the hill regions with enhanced early warning systems.
2. It was recognized that the **dumping of old clothes in crisis areas should not be promoted**, and alternative approaches to aid distribution should be explored.
3. There was an inquiry about the **combined plans of the Sikkim government with the West Bengal government** and the extent of collaboration between them.
4. The discussion highlighted the necessity to **strengthen early warning systems** for future disaster preparedness and response.
5. Concerns were raised regarding **how to mitigate the risks** associated with the existing water and ice in the glacial lake to prevent further disasters.

6. The contrast in disaster preparedness between Sikkim and West Bengal was noted, with **mock drills having been conducted in Sikkim, but not in West Bengal**. This highlights a lack of awareness for precautionary activities in West Bengal.
7. The **impact of development activities** on the disaster was recognized as a significant factor contributing to the crisis.
8. Participants expressed concerns about the preliminary assessment report characterizing the incident as relatively mild and emphasized the **need to focus on the impact in West Bengal**.
9. Participants noted that the preliminary assessment report **should incorporate the voices and experiences of the affected population** to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.
10. The group agreed that the **focus on the dam failure issue should not be diverted**, as the type of development activities taking place in the fragile Himalayas is considered a contributing factor to the disaster.

Key Action Points

- **Sikkim SDMA to share Short-Term Recovery Plan:** At present the focus is on short-term recovery, towards which the SSDMA has developed a plan that will be shared for everyone's knowledge and further planning
- **Prepare a White Paper collating commitments from diverse Humanitarian Agencies:** Sphere India has been requested to compile response plans and commitments, thereby facilitating the creation of a unified response strategy. All participating organizations and other responding agencies are urged to share their plans with Sphere India.
- **Go-NGO Collaboration:** Civil society organizations should collaborate closely with the government to establish community engagement and preparedness initiatives at the local level. This collective effort aims to work on mitigation measures for addressing future disasters effectively.
- **Balanced and Comprehensive Report:** It is essential to prepare a balanced and combined report that accurately captures the impact of the GLOF in both Sikkim and West Bengal, ensuring that the experiences and challenges in both regions are equally represented.

ANNEXURE

Agenda

Time	Topic	Facilitators
15:00 - 15:05	Welcome Address & Context Setting	Sphere India
15.05 - 15.15	Assessment Findings	Mr. Cyljo Abraham Deputy Manager - IAC, Sphere India
15:15 - 15:25	Situation Overview and Needs: Sikkim	Mr. Hemant Kumar Deputy Director, Bhavishya Bharat
15:25 - 15:35	Situation Overview and Needs: West Bengal	Mr. Praful Rao President, Save The Hills
15:35 - 15:45	Cultivating Resilience: Insights and Lessons from this Flash Floods	Mr. Omkar Oniel Khare Risk and Resilience Specialist- UNICEF Odisha and West Bengal
15:45- 16:00	Keynote Address on State Government Actions and Strategies for Future Disaster Management	Prof. Vinod Kumar Sharma Vice Chairman, Sikkim SDMA
16:00 - 16:45	Open Discussion on Emerging Gaps, Challenges, Strategies and Solutions	Participants
16:45 - 16.55	Recommendations & Way Forward	Moderator
16:55 - 17:00	Vote of Thanks	Sphere India

Registration List

S.No.	Name	Designation	Organization
1.	Roshan Rai	PD	DLRPrerna
2.	DR MOHAMMED OSAMA	NATIONAL RESOURCE PERSON	SCHOOL AND MASS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ODISHA
3.	Shivam Priyadarshi	Research Scholar	CUSB
4.	Ashish kumar Dey	CEO	GHAROA
5.	Lakpa Tamang	Assistant Professor in Geography	University of Calcutta
6.	Vivek Chettri	Project Head	SPACE Sikkim
7.	Barot Hiteshkumar R	Aapda mitra GSDMA	DEOC Palanpur
8.	Ajaya Kumar	Director	Priyanikethan Charitable Society
9.	J J	Journalist	Independent
10.	Navdeep Singh	No	Delhi Civil Defence, AAPDA Mitra
11.	Yeshey Lotay	National Coordinator	GeoHazards International
12.	Sreeja S Nair	Fellow	The Energy and Resources Institute

SUMMARY REPORT

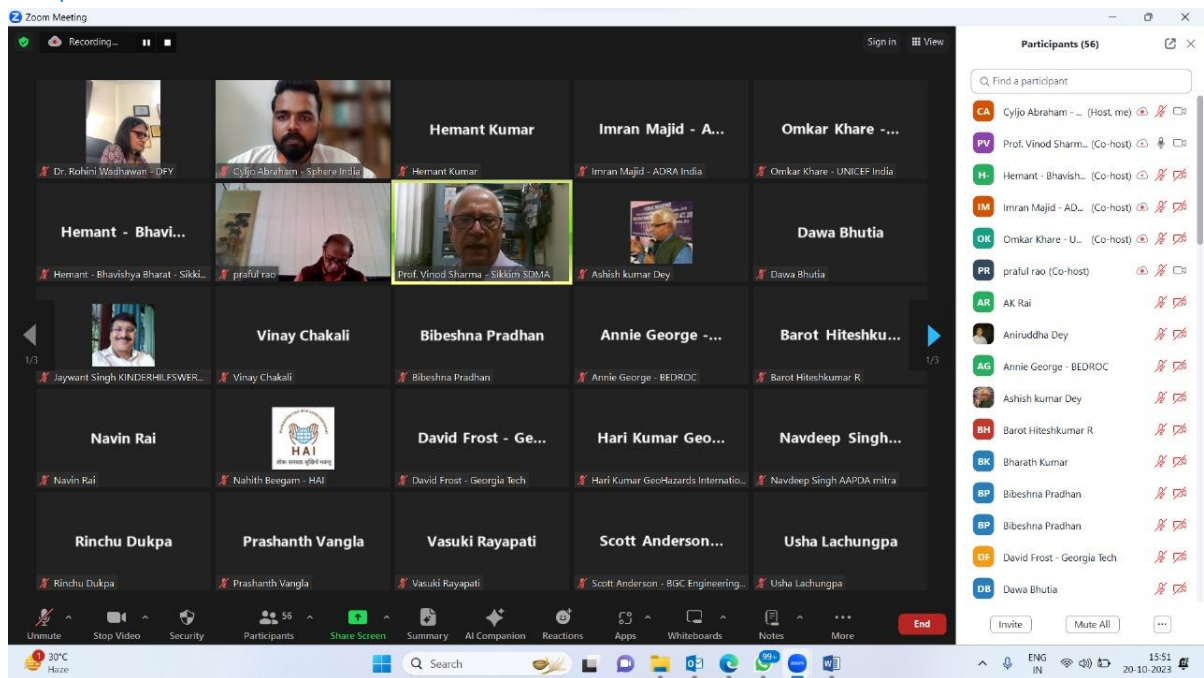
13.	Nahith Beegam	Programme Officer	Humanitarian Aid International
14.	Bibeshna Pradhan	PhD Scholar	Sikkim University
15.	Navin Rai	Research scholar	Sikkim University
16.	Prem Prakash	Hazard Analyst	Kerala SDMA
17.	Jagriti Chowdhury	Volunteer	Know Disasters
18.	Debashis Aich	Sr. Journalist	GroundZero web portal
19.	Prashanth Vangla	Assistant Professor	Indian Institute of Technology Delhi
20.	Vishnu P	Program Associate	Sphere India
21.	Hari Kumar	Regional Coordinator	GeoHazards
22.	David Frost	Professor	Georgia Institute of Technology
23.	Elliot Nichols	Graduate Research Assistant	Georgia Institute of Technology
24.	Rinchu Dukpa	Researcher	Wageningen University
25.	Megha. N Nair	RA	MG University
26.	Usha Lachungpa	President	Green Circle, Sikkim
27.	Prashant Chhetri	State Programme Manager (Sikkim)	Bhavishya Bharat
28.	Pema Bhutia	student	Manch
29.	Kritika Karki	CSR manager	Amdocs
30.	Neharika Bhattarai	PhD student	IIT Delhi
31.	Jaywant Singh	Director - Asia	Kinderhilswerk Global-Care, Germany
32.	Omkar Khare	Risk and Resilience Specialist	UNICEF
33.	Dawa Bhutia	Director	Himalayan good news networking ministry
34.	Rajendra P Gurung	CEO	Ecotourism & Conservation Society of Sikkim
35.	Luit Goswami	Director	RVC
36.	Ajay Govale	Vice president- Community Impact	United Way Mumbai
37.	Prasad Sevekari	Secretary	Redr India
38.	Pushplata Bhardwaj	Project Development Unit	Doctors For You
39.	Subrata Bhattacharyya	Former District Disaster Management Officer, WB	Individual
40.	Hemant Kumar	Director Operations & ADMN	Bhavishya Bharat
41.	Vinay Chakali	Programme Manager	Bhavishya Bharat
42.	Annie George	Director	BEDROC
43.	Deo Prakash Chettri	Adm & Finance Assistant	UNDP
44.	Dipali Jindal	Consultant	CDRI
45.	Vasuki Rayapati	Consultant	CDRI

SUMMARY REPORT

46.	Dr. Remya S N	Assistant Professor	Amrita University
47.	Imran Majid	PD	ADRA
48.	Praful Rao	president	savethehills
49.	Priya shrestha	Consultant	UNDP
50.	Scott Anderson	Principle Engineer	BGC Engineering
51.	OT Lepcha	General Secretary	TECS Ltd.
52.	Kabindra Sharma	Senior Project Fellow	Sikkim University
53.	Divya Gupta	Associate Director	SEEDS
54.	Dr Sudesh Wadhawan	Adjunct Professor	Amrita Univerity
55.	Sachin Tamang	Junior engineer	Wbsedcl
56.	Henna Hejazi	Program Officer, Humanitarian Response	Change Alliance
57.	Eilia Jafar	Co Founder	Tanyak
58.	Sridhar A	NA	NA
59.	Peniel Malakar	Consultant	Kriti
60.	Bharath Kumar	Senior Manager	Reliance Foundation
61.	Rozina Rupani	RM	SEEDS
62.	Gyatso Lepcha	Members	ACT
63.	Rohini Wadhawan	Pm	DFY
64.	Moitrayee Mondal	Humanitarian Program Coordinator	Oxfam India
65.	Mihir Bhatt	Director	AIDMI
66.	AK Rai	EDITOR	KALIMPONG PRESS CLUB
67.	Aachal Tamang	Program coordinator	Anugyalaya
68.	Pemzang Tenzing	NA	NA
69.	Aniruddha Dey	Chairperson & Convenor	CARN-AP
70.	Dr. Sharwan Kumar Singh	Sr Scientific Adviser	Utkarsh Ek Pahal
71.	Dr George V Joseph	Joint Director	DMI
72.	Vinod Sharma	Vice chairman	IIPA
73.	Col Sanjay Srivastava	Chairman	Climate Resilient Observing Systems Promotion Council
74.	Madhavi Sharma	Architect	KUNA

SUMMARY REPORT

Snapshots



Comprehensive Situation Reports

- [SitReps can be accessed here>>](#)

Preliminary Assessments Reports

- [All three versions of the report can be accessed here>>](#)

Inter-Agency Coordination Committee Meetings

- [Minutes of the three IAC Committee Meetings can be accessed here>>](#)

Unified Response Strategy (URS) Matrix

- [The URS Matrix can be accessed here>>](#)

Recording of the Multi-Stakeholder Consultation

- [YouTube Recording can be accessed here>>](#)

Sphere India is a National Coalition of Humanitarian, Development and Resilience Actors in India. The strategic outreach of 155 full members includes key nodal organizations from UN, INGOs, National NGOs, CSR , Academic Institutions, Sector Networks, Expert Individuals, and State IAGs/Networks. The local outreach is evolving with 805 associate members as Sphere India Locally Empowered Organisations Network (LEON) and 1,80,000 community volunteers (CDRF -Community Disaster Response Force) mapped for varied capacities all over India. Sphere India facilitates multi stakeholder coordination, knowledge & capacity sharing and collaborative advocacy for enhancing accountability to affected and at-risk population.

Contact

Sphere India Secretariat
Flat no. 123, Arun Vihar, Officers Colony
Sector-37 | Noida
201303, Uttar Pradesh, India

sphereindia.org.in 
info@sphereindia.org.in 