

Preface

Imagine a scenario. A powerful earthquake shook many cities and rural areas of a developing country. Thousands of people are killed—trapped in their houses, offices, schools, hospitals, and shops, which have been reduced to rubbles. A majority of citizens are traumatized after losing their loved ones and entire life's assets. Massive aid flows in. National and state governments, charity organizations, private sector, citizens, international and national aid agencies donate generously in the aftermath of this dreadful disaster. Apart from relief and recovery, the government promises to use this aid for long-term 'capacity building'—to prevent and reduce future disaster impacts.

Now think. If you revisit one of the affected cities 10 years after the earthquake, what are you most likely to find? You would imagine that the people in this place are better prepared for an imminent disaster since they sit on an earthquake fault. You would think that the massive aid that was collected for 'capacity building' was put to work and the new buildings and infrastructure are earthquake-resistant. You will imagine that the reconstructed cities, which were almost totally destroyed in the last earthquake, have wider roads for emergency vehicles, with alarms and drills to alert and prepare people. An emergency crew is ready to respond, relief materials and emergency funding are quickly available.

However, far from the expected findings, you find that citizens are no better prepared, no more concerned about their own safety. Many buildings and infrastructure are likely to fall down, even in low-intensity quakes. While there might be some means to alert people and rescue/relief materials stored in identified shelters, it is not enough. Higher levels of governments (national and state levels) believe that they have invested in preventing future impacts but are not taking any further actions. Local governments, private sector, non-profit charity organizations, and nongovernmental organizations know that people are not prepared and more is needed. But they are not taking any steps. If there is another earthquake in the city, there will be a lot more damages and fatalities this time—given that population and assets have grown. This is a 'capabilities trap' situation, where even after conscious capacity development efforts by the government and donors, there is no effective capacity.

One might think that the above scenario is hypothetical. In fact, this scenario is not only real but also very common. A number of deadly disasters hit the world in recent years including a cyclone in Philippines (2012) killing 1,100 people, earthquake in Indonesia (2009) killing over 1,000 people, cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (2008) killing 138,366 people, and the Sichuan earthquake in China (2008) killing 90,000 people. The 2010 earthquake in Haiti alone caused more than 200,000 deaths. Most of these places had suffered from earlier disasters.

With increased global attention to disaster prevention and preparedness, many developing countries are undertaking capacity building programs to reduce the extent of damages from disasters. The disaster mitigation activities include preventive actions aimed at reducing loss of lives and damages resulting from disasters. Governments and donors now agree that it is more cost-effective to invest in disaster management and preparedness activities than to keep on providing major relief and reconstruction aid. However, disasters continue to strike causing higher damages and losses, especially in areas that have witnessed disasters in the past. Overall, disaster events as well as number of affected people and disaster damages are increasing globally. Between January 1975 and October 2008, the international emergency disasters database (EM-DAT) recorded 8,866 natural disaster events killing more than two billion people with the majority of related mortality and losses (relative to GDP) concentrated in the last two decades and in low- and middle-income countries.

How can a place be built and managed so that it is safe for people to live? Ironically, many governments and people keep on asking the same question after every new disaster. Why, even with a high level of investment in increasing government's capacity to manage disasters, do the impacts of disasters continue to increase? Is capacity development in managing disasters not working? This book is about answering these questions, highlighting how current capacity development efforts for managing disasters are leading to capacity crisis or a capability trap situation. However, the main point of the book is not of a doomsday prediction—to sound alarm about more failures and higher disaster impacts in developing countries. On the contrary, this book is primarily about hope, optimism, and change. The book provides an alternative and a better way to develop effective capacity for preventing and managing future disaster impacts.

The solutions to the questions raised are based on two main lines of enquiries. First, what capacities are actually needed, and second, how to develop and sustain such capacities to ensure that they are effective in the long run. The enquiries are based on an assessment of current literature in international capacity development and disaster risk management fields, and an in-depth case study in three earthquake-affected towns of Gujarat, India, relying on interviews and surveys. A comparison of countries with better disaster prevention and response capacities with those that are not able to do so is also undertaken to support recommendations.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part, comprising of first two chapters, will set the scene on how there is a capacity crisis for managing disasters, particularly in developing countries. This part, deriving from the case study of capacity development after the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, India, will raise critical

questions on the meaning of capacity crisis situation. The second forward looking part, comprising of the remaining six chapters, will focus on what is meant by sustainable and effective capacity for managing and mitigating disaster impacts. Relying on current literature, field research, practical insights, and experiences of other countries, this part will provide recommendations for Gujarat case and general implications for donors, governments, and communities.

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Why disaster management capacity remains low in
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