

Aquatic disaster – An ILS challenge in developing countries

Pradipta Ghosal¹

Rashtriya Life Saving Society (India)¹

Flood, Tsunami and Cyclone – these aquatic disasters have taken away more lives than any other form of disaster in the recent past. The level of preparedness and knowledge among the affected was always found to be extremely poor or non-existent. The government / state agencies who are supposed to react to such catastrophes are always found to be ill-trained and ill-equipped. There is hardly any coordination among the various state agencies NGOs working in such situations. Data regarding the ongoing disaster is unavailable to the agencies that need it most; resulting in the rescue agencies not having enough information to prioritize their work. Basic relief materials never reach the rescuers who plunge into operations and reach the most affected regions but fail to bring in any relief for the marooned.

It has been observed that working manuals and standard equipment register for executing a relief & rescue operation is either non-existent or poor in quality. Standard working manuals from the angle of saving lives in aquatic disasters are non-existent. Most manuals prepared by large international organizations concentrate more on relief work than rescue operations.

A standard set of training manuals are also required for training of grass root population in hazardous zones. They should be trained in tandem with the Standard Operation Procedure to be followed by the relief & rescue teams. This will help in lessening the number of deaths due to lack of survival knowledge.

ILS should collect information on various disasters from affected countries, analyze them, develop specific precautions and practices from such cases in addition to the Standard Operating Procedures and try to get it implemented through the country organization or the state authorities.

In India, after the devastating tsunami in 2004, National Disaster Management Authority of India came into existence. The author of this article designed a 'Flood Relief & Rescue Management Course' which was given national accreditation instantly and asked to train the entire National Disaster Response Force, a force drawn out of four Indian para-military forces. Till date from 2005, RLSS(I) has trained more than 5,000 NDRF personnel and as a result there is reduction in number of deaths. Though, not all that we suggested in terms of equipments and others have been fully implemented by the authority to date, this training has built a tremendous amount of confidence among the force since now they individually know what to do, when they face a disaster. In addition, they can now assess the level of safety required both for them and also for the marooned. This has uniquely decreased the number of deaths among the personnel who themselves became victims during their course of work.

ILS needs to play a proactive role in collection of data, research of such data, come out with standard procedures and help train people who will expose themselves to work in such disasters including the Lifeguard volunteers, implement such training by impressing upon the state authorities. ILS should also urge each member country to train, equip and raise a sizable volunteer force to be mobilized within a maximum of 24 hours to reach the disaster spot and start its relief & rescue work. ILS must hold hands with other international or large national 'relief' agencies to work together so that the basic relief materials are at hand to be distributed while a rescue procedure is launched. If a 'rescuer man' holds hand with a 'relief man' then it becomes a very potent service. Hence, practice 'Relief & Rescue Together'.

Corresponding Author

Pradipta Ghosal
Member, ILS Aquatic Disaster Committee
Rashtriya Life Saving Society (India)
80/1/2 Kankulia Road
Kolkata West Bengal India 700029
Email: rlss_i_east@yahoo.co.in
Website: www.indianlifesaving.org
Telephone: +91 94 3311 6297