

**DISASTER RESILIENCE THROUGH RIGHT BASED AND CAPABILITY  
PERSPECTIVES OF NGOs: A CASE STUDY OF 2004 TSUNAMI IN  
NAGAPATINAM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Manifestation of disaster in the form of wide devastation and huge losses of life is a cause of concern, as it amounts to irreparable damages to the lives and property of the people. The chaos brought about by disasters in addition to breaking down the existing social structure, threatens the very survival and increasing the vulnerability of the community. However, human suffering and almost total disruption of community can be minimized with a well coordinated disaster management system, having well functioning warning systems combined with preparedness on the part of the vulnerable community. Disaster management strategies and risk reduction mechanisms can be effective in protecting the lives and livelihoods, only if it is focused on the needs of the people. In this regard, NGOs play a vital role in meeting the needs of the people. NGOs take a participatory approach in mitigating and managing disasters and respond to the priorities of local people and help them in building their capacities to manage future catastrophe. Thus, this paper intends to make an analysis of the role of NGOs in disaster resilience. The paper contemplates on the competencies deployed by NGOs in this direction. It further throws light on the good practices of NGOs, particularly their initiatives to promote livelihood, towards disaster resilience. The paper aims at developing a positive perspective into disaster management, using the theories of Human Right-based Approach and Capability Approach.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Capability Approach, Human Rights Based Approach, NGOs, Disaster Management, and Livelihood*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Not every windstorm, earth-tremor, or rush of water is a catastrophe. A catastrophe is known by its works; that is, to say, by the occurrence of disaster. So long as the ship rides out the storm, so long as the city resists the earth-shocks, so long as the levees hold, there is no disaster. It is the collapse of the cultural protections that constitutes the disaster proper.

Disaster has become a buzz word in recent times with the mounting happenings of devastations, whether natural or man-made disaster management has been debated and discussed in every sphere and so it is most appropriately on the agenda of public administration and governance.

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However, the importance of disaster management is realized only when a major disaster takes place. During normalcy, it often fades from our memory and occupies attention only when another major blow occurs. The Global Assessment Report (GAR) of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) has come up with its risk model which assesses a country's exposure to natural disasters in terms of mortality and economic losses. As per this report, South Asian Countries are positioned above 5, with Maldives having an unknown classification. Bangladesh and India were classified as 9 (major risk), Pakistan and Afghanistan as 8 (very high risk), Nepal and Bhutan as 6 and Sri Lanka as 5 (medium risk) (South Asia Disaster Report Special Copenhagen Issue, 2009). [1]

Thus, Asia as a region is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. Between 1991 and 2000, almost 40 % of the natural disasters occurred in Asia and the total affected people in the region counts for almost 90% of the world total (Nishikawa, 2003) [2]. In the same manner, it has been noticed; from the rankings, that India is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters. Disaster management and risk reduction have been major priorities in India, which has witnessed a strong history of disasters throughout. About 60% of the Indian landmass is susceptible to earthquakes and over 8% is prone to floods. Of the nearly 7500 kilometres long coastline, approximately 5700 kilometres is prone to cyclones and about 68% area is susceptible to drought (Eleventh Five Year Plan 2007-2012, 2008). India, along with International agencies, national agencies like National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), a number of NGOs, CBOs and other private players, is thoroughly involved in developing a disaster resilient community. However, the needs for more converted efforts in this direction are very much required. It appears to be high time to be proactive rather than being reactive, as in the past.

To make a study of disasters and plan for disaster preparedness and management is of utmost concern in today's world, as the evidence of global warming and the changing weather patterns and its effects, demands the attention of the world to ponder on it. The mounting consequences of climate change, postulates the risk of natural disasters occurring. The frequency of hazardous events happening worldwide in recent years and the magnitude of it stands evidence to this fact. Such natural hazards tend to trigger huge disasters, if focus is not laid on it and the vulnerability aspects that follow are not checked. Vulnerability to disasters is increasing due to growing population, rising poverty, armed conflict and other development issues. Blame gets placed on the hazard rather than on the conditions of vulnerability that have resulted from, for example, poor governance and corruption, unchecked neoliberal development policies and marginalisation of the poor (Schipper, Pelling 2006) [3].

Hence to bring about a disaster resilient community, overcoming the issue of vulnerability is of utmost importance and a multi-faceted disaster management process is vital. As put forward by Carr (1932) hazards, become disasters when cultural protection fails and its impact is severe on more vulnerable societies and communities. While effort can be made to prevent human induced disasters, not all disasters can be completely prevented. Due to lack of time warning and forecasting of natural disasters, it is difficult to presume and prevent its repercussions. However, the magnitude of disasters can be reduced through a well coordinated disaster management system and disaster reduction mechanisms.

For this purpose, participation and coordination of all stakeholders is paramount in minimising the vulnerability of the societies and communities prone. The involvement of various players, viz. government officials, community organizations, mass media, schools, NGOs, etc., are needed for this effort. However, it is understood that the state is the main player and has a critical role to play in disaster management. This is so, as the governments are directly responsible for citizens in their countries thus making it obligatory on their part to take appropriate measures for effective disaster management. Unfortunately, it is also true that the government does not have unlimited capability. The state cannot always provide detailed and elaborate care to all individual communities and citizens (JBIC Seminar, 2007) [4]. This brings to fore the crucial and significant role of the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who fill the gap by providing adequate care and support to the government and the community, and fills such grey areas untouched by the government. In particular, the critical role of NGOs as a facilitator and intermediary between the state and the community has been widely acknowledged in the disaster reduction and response phase. NGOs' participation in disaster resilience has been recognized as the necessary mechanism for helping the community in overcoming the repercussions of disaster and also in preparing it to handle disasters. Rarely would one today find, for instance, any UN or Government Strategy document dealing with development aid or emergency response that does not mention the role of NGOs as implementers and partners in the design of countrywide programmes (Skavdal, 2003) [5]. To such an extent, the activities of NGOs are deep-rooted at the grass root level. Especially, while dealing with emergencies or disaster situation, their potential is very much revealed. They are often successful in mobilising funds not only at the international level, but also at the national and grass roots level. In a number of recent disasters, the short term money available with NGOs has surpassed even that of the UN bodies (Ibid).

NGOs perform qualitative role in; offering immediate support; mobilising financial and material resources; reaching the victims immediately; providing training to them; supplementing the efforts of government by way of providing financial support; providing and protecting the livelihood of community; taking care of psychosocial aspect of the victims; etc. NGOs' presence has been largely felt in recent years, because of their good record of performance. By and large their visibility has tremendously been felt in responding to humanitarian issues in the wake of any disaster. However, one should not have a lopsided view on the role of NGOs. For all the success of NGOs, number of NGOs have been found lacking in good performance, besides wastage and lack of professionalism that to large extent has gone unchecked. Critics of NGOs have pointed to lack of accountability, mutual competitiveness and poor coordination as the three most serious charges (Skavdal, 2003) [5]. Such unethical work styles of some NGOs jeopardise the activities and interventions of large number of genuine NGOs, as well.

The disaster reduction cycle encompasses different phases in it viz. Pre-disaster Phase, Response and Immediate Relief Phase and Post-disaster Phase, which are interlinked to each other. Every phase of disaster management accords top priority to the risk reduction aspect, as this measure can minimize huge loss of lives and properties. Hence, a comprehensive approach to disaster management looks at evolving sound risk reduction strategies. Any risk reduction strategy, in order to be effective, has to place its central focus on protecting the lives and livelihoods of people.

Usually disaster management policies reflect top down approach, whereby policies are framed by the top level executives and this sounds to be quite inflexible, as participation of local people is

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given least priority, as they are treated only as victims. Such policies of the top level executives fail to address local needs as well as concerns and ignore the potential of indigenous resources and capacities. It should be realised that local people and organisations are the main actors in disaster risk reduction. In order to attain sustainable disaster reduction, it is not enough only through the initiatives of the government in disaster management. It requires a full-fledged effort of various actors, especially the community, who is actually the sufferer of adverse effects of disasters. Only the community can be of best help to the victims at the time of disasters, as they are available at close quarters and can respond to situation immediately, even before the government, NGOs or other players, arrive at the scene. Hence, the community should be trained with the coping and survival strategies so that they are able to handle disasters in an effective manner. The efforts of NGOs consider the participation of people paramount in intervention strategies and they are treated as co-partners. They concentrate on building the capacity and capability of people, so as to protect themselves against hazards. This helps in reducing the vulnerability of the people as it strengthens the environmental, social and economic resilience (Ibid).

NGOs participation is essential in all phases of disaster management and they contribute to building the capacities of people, in handling disasters in its entire phase. NGOs play a facilitative, supporting and catalytic role in meeting the needs of community and reducing the disaster risks of community.

NGOs should be looked up as a community in itself. Though it can never match the efforts of government, definitely the magnitude of its operation should not be overlooked, as they possess something unique to offer, and are spread across at all levels field, regional, national or global.

Many NGOs, flock together to provide assistance to communities that are affected by disasters. Though the best intentions of NGOs are to be appreciated, many studies point out that NGOs operate well outside their expertise and due to the fact that action was urgent and essential and did so without the capacity, capabilities and competencies in place to deliver satisfactory projects. However, NGO initiatives cannot be completely blamed, as they do bring a wealth of knowledge to the table within the humanitarian sector.

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), United Nations (2006), in its report has stated that the involvement of NGOs is quiet beneficial in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities because of certain reasons:

- NGOs can operate at grassroots level with communities and local organizations as partners, and take a participatory approach to development planning. This allows them to respond better to local people's priorities and build on local capacities.
- NGOs enjoy higher operational flexibility as they are relatively free from bureaucratic structures and systems, and better able to respond and adapt quickly and easily.
- NGOs often work with and on behalf of most needy groups: the poorest and the most vulnerable.

### **Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

The participation of NGO sector in India, in general, since independence has been impressive and they have made a significant contribution in welfare programmes, development-oriented

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initiatives, empowering women and weaker sections, protecting the rights of marginalized, protecting the environment and in spreading literacy and education (Sooryamoorthy and Gangrade, 2001) [6]. The activities of NGOs are heterogeneous in nature because of the wide and complex set of activities they undertake and also because of the differences in their organization, ideology, objectives and the target groups they serve.

Some NGOs are welfare oriented and aim at protecting the welfare of the people where as some others focus on bringing a radical change in the society. Some rely on foreign sources and there are other NGOs who depend on the indigenous sources. Some of the organizations directly deliver services to the poor people while others organize people in helping themselves and attempt to build the capabilities of the people. Among these NGOs, there are some who involve themselves in replicating the policies and programmes of the government or other NGOs unlike certain other organizations that innovate and demonstrate new programmes themselves (Ibid).

The early voluntarism was regarded as conventional voluntarism in which the focus of the voluntary organizations was mainly welfare oriented or oriented towards social reform. They were primarily functioning only as charitable trusts. They were inspired by idealism. 1990s witnessed transformation in the focus of the NGOs and the modern voluntarism concentrated on various aspects and they were concerned more about the development of the people and addressed the issue of basic needs and human rights of the people. The modern voluntarism aims at achieving development and social justice and they are inspired by ideology rather than idealism (Bhatt, 1995) [7]. This paradigm shift from the welfare of the people to the rights of the people is justified as an expression of the emphasis on popular participation or participatory development. The principal advantage of NGOs lies in their proximity to people and their sensitivity to the needs of the community (Sooryamoorthy and Gangrade, 2001) [6]. A prominent feature of the nongovernmental sector is its capability of bringing people together and motivating them to participate in the developmental process.

### **NGOs' Intervention in dealing with Disasters**

There are enough evidences to prove that NGOs are performing a commendable job in the management of disasters and are involved in a number disaster risk reduction activities. While certain NGOs are committed in advocating for policy changes, others are active in mainstreaming DRR into rehabilitation and recovery programmes. Many others have engaged actively in protecting the livelihood, spreading awareness about the rights of community, capacity building, knowledge transfer and public awareness in communities at risk. All these efforts have contributed to reducing the vulnerability of those living in disaster-prone areas and increasing their resilience through educational activities and capacity building. The broad areas of interventions of NGOs as identified by ISDR are as follows:

#### **Policy and Advocacy**

Many NGOs are involved in advocating for better DRR policies and practices, at international and national level. There is advocacy to mainstream the disaster management policies into the development planning, development goals and also in the policy document of the government. However, at the same time it should also be noted that the organisations that usually work on this front, are not involved in the implementation of such policies that they advocate. A different set of NGOs are involved in implementing and supplementing the policies and roles of the

government. It calls for utmost care to be taken by NGOs while advocating disaster related policies. They should have a strong knowledge of the actual happenings at the ground level and have a better understanding of the intricacies, before advocating.

### **Knowledge and Education**

People who are better informed and were motivated towards the culture of disaster prevention and resilience are the ones who are better able to handle disasters and reduce its consequences. To reduce the impact of disasters, people should be aware of the nature and ill effects of hazards and the vulnerabilities associated with it. Several NGOs play a key role in this area and they are involved in the task of collection, compilation and dissemination of relevant knowledge and information about various hazards and the ways and methods to handle it. Such NGOs educate vulnerable communities about the potential impact of natural hazards, and assist them in identifying possible ways to minimize their adverse consequences through collective and preventive action. A considerable number of booklets, brochures, videos and other awareness material has been produced in local languages for this purpose, and distributed among local communities to help them cope with future disasters. Some NGOs have focused their efforts on building upon local skills and resources (generally referred to as “indigenous knowledge”).

### **Community-Based Vulnerability and Risk Assessment**

Certain NGOs are involved in the task of making a study of the vulnerability of the community members and make risk assessment. They map physical, social and economic risk faced by the community and study how they manage and, tackle such risks. Such NGOs concentrate on developing the toolkits to analyse people’s vulnerability and assess risks. This helps in drawing up action plans, mobilise resources and enact appropriate policies, laws and strategies to reduce community vulnerability to disasters (Ibid).

### **Community-Based Mitigation and Preparedness**

NGOs are involved in diverse range of disaster mitigation and preparedness initiatives. In terms of mitigation, structural interventions of NGOs include engineering works, like protective dikes, embankments, safe building design. Non-structural interventions include community risk reduction planning, food security programmes, group savings, cooperatives, crop insurance, etc. NGOs are also involved in the preparedness activity and they take proactive measures in anticipation of a disaster. Such preparedness activities of NGOs include, setting up of early warning system, training for evacuation and emergency operations management.

There is substantial evidence to prove that NGOs contribute in building the communities’ resilience to disasters. As mentioned in the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA), NGOs also assist in bringing the goal of HFA into reality, that is, NGOs contribute in strengthening the capacities and resilience of households and communities to protect their lives and livelihoods. Making an analysis of the role of NGOs in Disaster Resilience with particular focus on livelihood strategies becomes essential to find out the effectiveness of the projects handled by NGOs. This attempt would be useful in finding the pros and cons of the initiatives of NGOs which would be helpful to purge the unsuccessful practice and replicate the constructive efforts. The forth coming section of this paper would bring out few successful case studies of NGOs involved in the district of Nagapattinam. Analysis to this effect is made with the backdrop of the theoretical base of Human Right Based Approach (HRBA) and Capability Approach.

## **Relevance of Capability and Human Rights Perspectives in Disaster Resilience**

By and large, during pre-disaster phase, response phase, or post-disaster phase, the approach usually followed is 'command model', such as top-down approach, policy-driven approach, fixed structure, rigid hierarchical, centralised, etc. However, all such models will not be able to yield the desired benefit, as it is not people-centred. The management of disaster recovery is best approached from a community development perspective and is most effective when conducted at the local level with the active participation of the affected community and a maximum reliance on local capacities and expertise. Thus, any approach if it has to penetrate the community and motivate the people to development, it should have focus on the people, rather than the policies. Especially when dealing with disasters, people-centred approach should be the first priority, as we cannot have a trial and error method, when it involves the lives and livelihood of vast majority of people, who become vulnerable to disasters. Such relevance on people-centred focus is found in the human right based approach and the capability approach. If such approaches are incorporated and integrated in the practices of disaster management and mitigation, it is most likely to attain the desired gain.

This study ponders on the contribution of NGOs by setting the base on the capability approach and right-based approach and looks at the prospects of applying the components of these two approaches to increase the resilience in the community. Analysis is made in this paper, in the context of resilience development among the community and proposes that the basic goal of resilience mentioned in the Hyogo Framework of Action can be achieved, with the focus laid on the needs of the people, in terms of rights, which they are entitled and in terms of capabilities, which enhances their skills to handle future hazards effectively. Thus the needs of the people in terms of rights and capabilities are best reflected in the livelihood framework, as livelihood is the main component needed for the very survival and which incorporates both rights and capabilities. So taking the context of livelihood, NGOs role in promoting the rights and enhancing the capability of community is analysed. This component if addressed properly by the NGOs, has the potential to address various issues like reduction of vulnerability, disaster impacts etc. thereby helping to build a disaster resilience community.

The scale and magnitude of a disaster is largely determined by the vulnerability of the people. Developing countries generally suffer the most because of natural disasters, as the vulnerability is more in such countries than the developed countries. Moreover, the coping mechanism is also strong in developed countries than the developing countries. Availability of sufficient funds cannot be stated as the main reason for coming out of disaster impacts quickly. If that be the case, developing country, like India, would not face much disaster impacts as it is evident that sufficient funds are pooled in from various sources to meet the needs of the people. Hence, finance is, though a major concern, not the main criteria for bringing people back to normalcy. Thus, what makes the difference is the capability of the people in overcoming the disaster impacts. A rich Mississippi farmer and a Bangladeshi peasant are prone to similar river flooding. The former with greater material possessions, valuable land and crops, has much more at stake but, through insurance, state and federal aid, and the ability to apply a variety of resources, he may well come out of his 'disaster' better off than previously. The Bangladeshi peasant with almost nothing to lose will almost certainly be left destitute (Ritchie, 1979) [8]. The difference is that, the Bangladeshi peasant's capabilities become unrealizable, because of his vulnerabilities. He is deprived further and moreover is not aware of the mechanisms to come out of the situation.

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On the other hand, the Mississippi farmer, is not vulnerable, and he is able to overcome the disaster by way of his capabilities. Education, knowledge and awareness, make him to claim the insurance, apply for state and federal aid, besides applying various other capability to overcome the situation.

Vulnerability can be reduced with the application of capability approach into the disaster management system. Especially, the deprivation line of the community, at pre and post disaster, has to be looked at for this purpose. Of all kinds of deprivation, poverty makes the community more vulnerable. Their meagre assets, heavy dependence on their labour for survival, limited opportunity for migration/evacuation and little or no access to insurance and credit contribute to their vulnerability (Baas, Ramasamy, et.al, 2008) [9]. In urban areas, the vulnerable sectors are the urban poor, while in rural areas, they are the subsistence farmers, fisher folks and indigenous people (Victoria). However, the communities' deprivation includes, not only the income deprivation, but also other kind of deprivation, viz. Health, Education, etc., which hold back people's well being. Sen suggests measuring the welfare of individuals by focusing on their capabilities (what an individual is able to do or be) instead of analyzing the welfare problem through resource based approaches (for example income and expenditure) and generating a framework for comprehension of context attributes (Yorulmaz,). It is important to recognize people's needs when they face such difficulties as disasters. Identifying the areas in which people are deprived (not only in terms of income) and converting the needs together with the minimum capabilities into successful outcomes will help to reduce the negative outcomes of a catastrophe (Ibid). Thus, improvement of human capabilities by way of health, education, nutritional status, technical skills etc. would strengthen the community, thereby improving their coping strategies and this in turn would reduce their vulnerability.

It won't be out of place to mention that any organisation, that intends to meet the basic needs of people in the aftermath of disasters, should look at the way of life and means of the people which makes them vulnerable to hazards. Identifying the vulnerabilities and alleviating the causes will minimize the adverse effects of disasters on individuals' well-being. Hence, NGOs should look at identifying the aspects of vulnerability and try to reduce the vulnerability of the people by developing the capabilities of the community, to promote disaster resilient society. Across the entire range of disaster relevant policies, programmes, activities, arrangements and protocols, at state, regional, municipal and local levels, work is being undertaken to further strengthen community capacity to prepare for, plan for, respond to and recover from disasters (Buckle, 2001) [10]. Resilience enhancement and vulnerability reduction along with sustainable development of the community is possible with the coordination of various institutions following the approaches of rights and capability of the people.

## **Capability Approach**

Sen argues that "the quality of life is best understood in terms of what people can do or can be and that development is best thought of in terms of an expansion of (valuable) capabilities". He picked up the expression 'capability' to represent the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be. He uses the term functionings to refer to states of the person—to 'beings and doings' and the additional functionings that can be derived out of the single functioning, is referred to as the 'capability set'. A person's capability set thus tells us what s/he can do or can be".



Capability approach is identified as ‘what people are able to do and to be’. That is, an individual generates functionings from the commodities or competencies that he/she owns or possesses and chooses the valued one among the available opportunities. For example, if a person owns land, he would choose the valued options from the available opportunities. He might do farming, or construct an apartment and rent it or build a factory on the land, etc. In the same way, if skills training is imparted to a person to enhance her/his livelihood, s/he will use her/his skills and knowledge to obtain other valued option, like s/he might start her/his own business using the training, work in other enterprise/organization, or might become a trainer to impart the same knowledge to others and so on.

Thus, the capability approach is focused on the individual’s capabilities and functioning. But the vulnerable individuals are powerless even to realize that ‘functioning’, even if the central or the state government or other voluntary organizations are willing and able to provide financial or basic services to the victims, is a difficult task. Therefore participation by the victims has to be at the collective level. Without collective action, the voices of the vulnerable can rarely be heard (Mehrotra, 2005) [11]. Various institutions and NGOs should come forward in support of the community to promote their knowledge and skills and give a voice to the voiceless. NGOs fill this gap by responding quickly to the needs of the people, who are affected by disasters. This is possible because of their proximity to the vulnerable people. NGOs are of great assistance to the people, and also to the government at times of disasters and they offer support to mitigate, prepare for and recover from disasters.

Capability approach focuses on improving people’s capabilities over a period through the design of ‘human development’ strategies and it leads to the improvement of access to health and education services, to adequate nutrition and safe water supply, thus improving the level of human capital on the whole. However, there are limitations to capability approach. There is no definitive set of capabilities, when talking about the state of well being of someone and it differs from one person to another. Development paradigm should concentrate on expanding the freedoms or rights of the people so that they are able to realise and enjoy the basic capabilities and engage in participation process. Recognition of the rights of the community would help in promoting or achieving the functionings that people value.

In this study, focus is laid not on the generated functioning, but rather on the main functions, that contribute to the additional functioning. Even in terms of capability, the study focuses on the particular capability of livelihood. Capabilities such as education, health, etc. are not discussed in this study, as it is understood, that if livelihood is promoted, it can contribute to the provision of other valuable functionings, viz., sound education, health etc. Thus making an analysis on the livelihood of people in the post disaster scenario would help in identifying the people, who are most vulnerable. If NGO imparts training to the vulnerable section, to promote their livelihood, it will make them strong, as they would use that as a means to recover from the disaster.

### **Right-Based Approach to Disaster Management**

The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) regards empowerment of the people as a core strategy in ensuring that the system of governance is reformed to respond to issues that affect their lives. Vulnerability to disasters is one such issue that affect the lives and livelihood of people (Kumar, 2007) [12]. A right based approach has wider advantages with focus on the community rather than other players. HRBA looks at the issue of ‘vulnerability’ from the angle

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of susceptibility, weakness and deprivation of people. It senses vulnerability on a different angle and empathize the victims on their state of helplessness, dependence, lack of opportunities and lack of self confidence and self respect. The language of rights makes it clear that, the vulnerable people are not subject of charity and benevolence. They are entitled to a decent standard of living and that rights are the vehicles for their participation and empowerment (Hyden and Court, 2006) [13].

In 2003, the United Nations issued a statement of common understanding, a document that highlights the primary elements of right-based approaches. This document recognizes people as the key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services. Thus, Human Right-Based Approach (HRBA) to disaster management would be more effective, as it concentrates on ensuring that the marginalised, vulnerable or the victims get their due share of inputs, before, during and after a disaster. An increased awareness will ultimately reduce the vulnerability of affected populations, vulnerable groups and individuals and enable transition to normalcy and contribute to increased risk reduction, all within a human rights-based framework.

In spite of the fact that we have national laws protecting the rights of the people and also having ratified international human rights instruments; the State is failing to meet these standards in post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation work. It is absolutely imperative that existing human rights violations are recognised, acknowledged and urgently rectified. It is, therefore, a huge responsibility on all of us to recognize relief and rehabilitation as a matter of right, not a mere charity. HRBA should be implemented in all phases of disaster management and the human rights principles of non-discrimination, participation, inclusion, accountability, etc. should be well integrated and incorporated in the disaster preparedness, response, transition and recovery and help out the community (Program on International Health and Human Rights).

As per the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (2009), Human rights can be described as the human entitlement to enjoy basic capacities such as dignity and freedom where every individual and group retains the right to life without fear of torture or detention. The right based approach is of the view that the right-holders should have the capacity to claim their rights and the duty-bearers should fulfil their obligations. In this regards, comes the role of NGOs and other organizations, who are involved in similar lines, and they concentrate on developing the strategies to build the capacity of the people to claim their rights. Along with livelihood rehabilitation needs, people would be able to realize the social and economic rights, which the state is entitled to provide to the people, with the focus on human rights approach. Many NGOs in the tsunami affected area, has come up with livelihood recovery programmes to improve the capability of the people.

The following section, presents the examples of few successful NGOs working towards livelihood promotion in the tsunami affected Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu.

### ***Successful Case Studies of NGOs in Nagapattinam***

The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 had caused devastating damages to the lives and property of many countries leading to irreparable damages to the Indian coast as well. About 2,000 kilometres of the Indian coastline was submerged for a distance of up to two kilometres; 12,400 people were killed; 46,600 houses were lost or damaged in 559 villages; and 650,000 people

were made homeless. In all, 3.2 million people were affected, of whom 2.7 million lost their livelihoods. The most seriously affected (one-third of the total) were from the fishing sector, losing 88,000 boats and nearly a year's worth of production. However, the response to the tsunami was swift and comprehensive and it encompassed a combination of endeavours by government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local community initiative. An important part of the overall response has been the development of alternative livelihoods to supplement the vulnerable in the most affected communities (Kilby, 2007) [14].

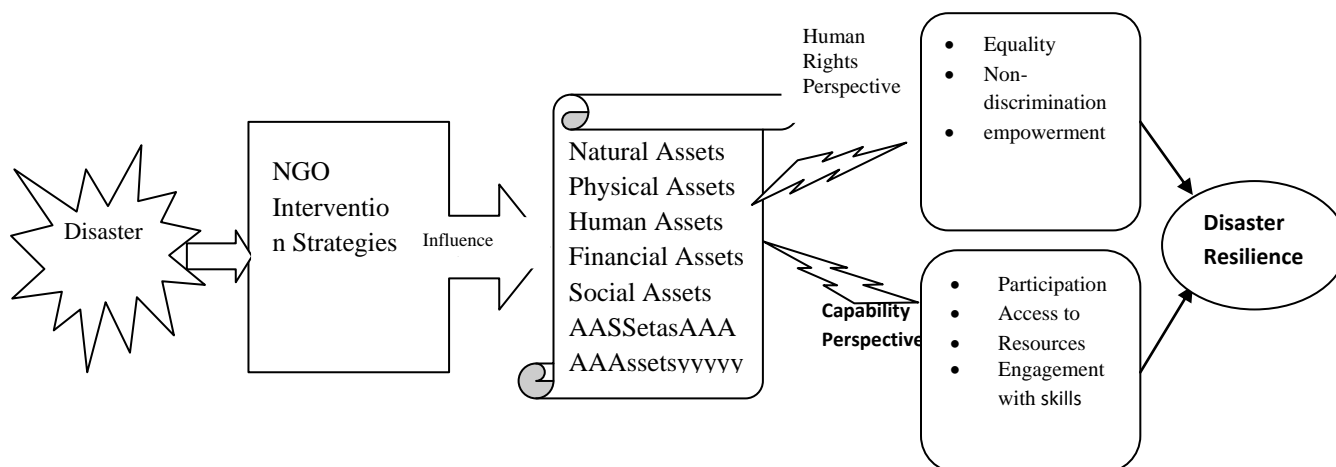
The succeeding text focuses on the contribution of NGOs in promoting a disaster resilient community, especially in creating awareness amidst the people about their rights and in improving the capability of people in enhancing their livelihood. Livelihood support was offered by various NGOs in the aftermath of tsunami in Nagapattinam, to help the people in coming out of their miserable conditions. The government of Tamil Nadu declared that 13 districts were affected by Tsunami, out of which 7 districts were badly affected. This study makes an analysis of one of the worst affected districts, that is, Nagapattinam. As per the report of the Tamil Nadu Government, Nagapattinam district, around 196184 people were affected, 39941 were left homeless and the worst of all is that around 6000 lost their lives.

## **Study Design**

This study involves analysis of the role of NGOs involved in resilience measure in the villages of Nagapattinam district that was worst affected in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. This disaster in particular is appropriate for this study, as there were many NGOs that responded in the aftermath of this disaster. The measures taken to promote resilience in the community, following the tsunami were done in large scale and hence would be appropriate in analysing the role of NGOs as it presents detailed information about the activities undertaken. Moreover, this would be the apt time to make a study of the role of institutions, as it is not too early or too late, and we would be able to find out how resilient the communities are.

## **Framework based on Right Based and Capability Approach**

As discussed earlier, capability and right based approach is the most relevant mechanism useful in understanding the rights of the local community and also in identifying the key opportunities available to them. Thus, the realised rights and opportunity, improve the capability of the community, thereby benefitting the community by way of enhanced livelihood and resilience. Interrelationship between both the approaches in bringing up the potential of the people has to be understood and applied by the NGOs for achieving positive results. The fundamental requirements for improving livelihood are the ability to incorporate human rights and enhance capabilities in any intervention aiming at the development of the community. Livelihood Assets, Access and Activities should be pumped with such suitable intervention that incorporates both rights and capabilities, for best outcome of resilience, which has been depicted in the following diagram.



As per the definition given by DFID, Livelihood is nothing but the means of living that include capabilities, assets and activities; and livelihood initiatives are considered sustainable only when they can cope with and recover from external shocks and stresses and maintain or enhance the capabilities and assets now and in the future (Moser, 2006). Hence, any sustainable effort in improving the livelihood of the people, should not only aim at improving the living conditions of the people, but should concentrate on improving the potential of the people with sufficient capacity and capability, so that they are able to cope with any disastrous situation that may or may not happen in the future.

Sustainable livelihood concept of DFID has been picked up by a number of agencies, viz. government, NGOs and other private organizations, etc; in their initiatives to cope up with the needs of the people. The established perspectives of DFID’s Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) have been reconfigured in an innovative way in this paper, by adding the perspectives of right based and capability approach. In this regard, institutions play a major role in bringing out the livelihood outcomes. One such effort of NGOs in bringing out the livelihood outcome is discussed here.

As per the DFID framework of livelihood, there are 5 types of assets viz., natural assets, physical assets, financial assets, human assets and social assets. Availability of these assets determines the living standard of the people and non-availability of the same puts people in vulnerable situation. When a place is devastated by unexpected disasters, there is severe impact laid on these assets. At times of disasters, people whose assets are not threatened are the ones who are free from vulnerability. On the other hand, those people become more vulnerable, whose assets are severely damaged. Hence, restoring of these assets would help in reducing the vulnerability of the people and bringing resilience in the community.

Institutions are social cement which links the victims with access of various kinds of capital, which helps in making the livelihood. Access to livelihood resources is arranged by NGOs through various strategies, which is adopted as per the local conditions and needs of the people. NGOs can play a vital role to this effect, and can make its contribution by influencing the assets of the community, by its intervention programmes and strategies. Rather than focusing solely on the usual ways of intervention, by way of providing the requirements, skills, technologies, etc. emphasis on such issues can be made from the backdrop of the rights of the people and capability of the people. Such an emphasis will improve the effectiveness of the intervention and

provide a wider perspective. In this paper, when taking the rights and capability as the backdrop, certain components of these 2 approaches have been considered for this study. That is, the key components of right based approach like non-discrimination (access to all) and participation and empowerment has been considered for the analysis. Similarly, the key capabilities that can promote the opportunities of the people like participation and engagement with skills has been considered.

Thus, successful intervention of several NGOs based on this framework, related to assets and the two approaches have been discussed here.

## **NGOs Role as per the Framework**

The interventions of NGOs have been analysed by considering the influence of NGOs on various assets. NGOs intervention programmes for each asset is analysed taking in keeping with the components of rights and capability approach.

### *Natural Capital*

Natural capital consists of the natural resources like water, land and biological resources like trees, pasture and biodiversity. Because of tsunami, the natural resources like trees, land, etc., got severely affected. Land is considered as the critical asset, which not only serves as a productive asset for the community, but also serves as an important means of livelihood. Livelihood of both the fishing and non-fishing communities got severely affected after tsunami. Agricultural land near the coastal areas got severely damaged and thousands of cattle were washed away. The land was affected in three ways, viz. high salinity, complete washout of organic matter and almost dead soil with no microbial activity (TNTRC, 2007). Post-tsunami scenario has brought about significant changes in the livelihood activities of the people in Nagapattinam. Many people, who were dependent on agricultural land, got unemployed all of a sudden after the tsunami. Sudden change in the economic conditions of the people made them more vulnerable.

To this effect, Tamil Nadu Organic Farmers Movement (ToFarM), an NGO registered in 2005, undertook the task of promoting sustainable ecological farming. The activity of the TOFARM covers the villages of South Poiganallur, Kovilpathu, Naluedapathy, Periyakuthagai of Nagapattinam (NCRC, 2008). In order to protect the livelihood of the district, ToFarm launched the project, "Reclamation and reconstruction of tsunami-affected agricultural villages in Nagapattinam". ToFarm, thus, concentrated on creating awareness on the need for rehabilitation of agricultural lands and also contributed to organic methods of rehabilitation. The activities of ToFarm include land reclamation, de-silting of water bodies and promotion of vermi-compost, creation of farm ponds, etc.

Thus, ToFarm contributed in influencing the natural asset and protected the livelihood of the people. The success of the effort of ToFarm can be attributed to the application of capability and rights perspective, knowingly or unknowingly. The principle of equality and non-discrimination of HRBA seems to appear in the initiative. ToFarm promoted access to all kinds of farmers, land owners, small and marginal farmers, landless labourers of Sirkali and Nagapattinam Taluks were covered. Apart from this, participation of the community members was also promoted. Farmers were considered as the key participants in the meetings and discussions on service package and implementing strategies, where they shared their method of farming practice. In the same manner, team of ToFarm also shared its experience in salinated land reclamation, organic

agriculture, etc. Further, in order to promote the capability and skills of the community, ToFarm also provided training to farmers on soil and water management, integrated pest management, etc. as part of sustainable management practices. Marginal communities, that is the landless labourers were also involved, and lands were provided on lease to them to perform organic farming. Further opportunities were created for the farming communities by linking them with institutions like engineering department, animal husbandry, etc. Financial assistance was also provided to landless labourers to start up livelihood initiatives. Thus the effort of ToFarm in influencing the natural asset of the community can be said to have a mix of the components of right based and capability approach.

## **Financial Capital**

Financial capital implies the financial resources that are available to the community in the form of savings, supplies of credit. Apart from the savings and money, it also includes easily disposable incomes like livestock, access to credit, etc. In Nagapattinam, to help people in coming out of the impact of tsunami and promote their livelihood, many NGOs like Alternative for Indian Development (AID), South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS), REAL, YMC, CREATE, etc., focused on providing micro credit. Thus, micro-credit facilities were provided to marginal communities like fishing community, small, marginal and landless farmers, fisher women, etc. Alternative for Indian Development (AID), an NGO based in Chennai, involved in the Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation work in Nagapattinam. The programmes of AID covered about 12 villages of Nagapattinam. In the immediate rehabilitation phase, the focus of AID was to support SHGs and Youth Groups of fisher women and men, to revive their livelihood in the activities of fish vending, coir rope making, pickle making, etc. Access to credit facilities were provided to all sections of the community, irrespective of their caste, creed and economic status. And to promote the participation of the community, a community managed micro-finance system was created to ensure the growth and sustainability of funds. Revolving funds were provided to the community by having a tie-up with various banking institutions. Thus linkage with banking institutions provided the opportunity to the community to promote their small business and involve in other income generating activities. In the same manner, micro credit was provided to fisher folk by the NGO, South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS). Villages of Nagapattinam like Kodiakkarai, Tarangambadi, Arcottuturai, etc., were covered under the programme. SIFFS also organised training sessions and discussion forum for the community to promote awareness on the issues of insurance, savings and loan schemes. Thus the micro finance activities of NGOs have contributed to the overall performance of the community and strengthened their financial stability.

## **Physical Capital**

Physical capital includes the stock of plant, equipment, housing, infrastructure such as roads, irrigation works, electricity, housing etc. that is owned by an individual or community. After the tsunami, physical capital of the community like housing, boats, farming lands, etc; got severely damaged and threatened the very existence of the community. Of all, housing was considered as the most critical asset, as this serves as a basic necessity. Most of the houses were either washed away or severely damaged by tsunami. To this effect, significant progress was made by NGOs in the housing sector. In coordination with NGO Co-ordination and Resource Centre (NCRC), training was provided to the masons and engineers at Nagapattinam on the safe construction

practices and technical support was provided for construction. Along with housing, infrastructural services like electricity, water and sanitation and access to roads, etc. were also regulated by the NGOs in Nagapattinam, which came to a standstill in the aftermath of tsunami. The NGO, People's Development Association (PDA) was involved in providing humanitarian support to the vulnerable. The main focus of PDA is on empowerment and development and their interventions demonstrated the rights and entitlement of the people to livelihood and shelter. Such efforts facilitated the community in reviving their livelihood and reconstruct their lost assets. PDA's intervention extended to the villages of Keechankuppam, Velankanni, Vettaikaraniruppu, Vellapallam, etc. PDA was involved in the construction of permanent shelters and duly complied with the procedures of land acquiring and launching agreement. On construction of the houses in each village, the permanent shelters were handed over to the concerned beneficiaries through the district authorities. Thus, issue of dignity, rights and entitlements of the community were given utmost importance in providing safe and secured housing to the community. Apart from housing, community halls were also constructed by PDA for the welfare of tsunami affected people in Nagapattinam.

## **Human Capital**

Human capital denotes the involvement of human resources in qualitative aspects like investment in education, health and nutrition of individuals. Labour is also linked to investments in human capital. Human resource is the most significant asset, as it has the ability to contribute to sustainable livelihood of the people. For example, health status determines people's capacity to work whereas skill and education determine the returns from their labour. Understanding the critical importance of this element, interventions of many NGOs concentrated on promoting the human capital, by way of skills upgradation and education. One such NGO, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) was involved in the tsunami relief and rehabilitation activities in the village of Madavamedu in Nagapattinam. ADRA had focussed on promoting a range of income generating activities for the tsunami victims, especially women, to ensure sustainable livelihood. Fishing was the major source of income for the community. But fishing got affected in the aftermath of tsunami for some time. In order to provide alternative employment, ADRA imparted training for skill development. Candle making, fancy bag making, vessel hiring, bakery, etc. were introduced by ADRA as secondary income generative activities. Training was also imparted in tailoring, screen printing, etc. Initial investment was made by ADRA and for subsequent investments; loans were arranged for the people. For people who wanted to start business on a small scale, orientation was given on business planning, costing, and division of labour. Training programmes for the same was arranged by ADRA in collaboration with District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). Though infrastructure for income generating activity was provided by ADRA, the responsibility of managing the activity was given to the SHG or community, involved in the task. Thus, confidence and motivation of the community got boosted up and they felt, they were empowered. Training in various activities strengthened their capabilities, giving them better exposure to income generating activities. However, it should also be said that though the training was useful to the community, people couldn't make adequate investment, and the effort was not fully sustainable.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is an intangible asset, which constitutes rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity and trust embedded in social relations, social structures and societies' institutional arrangements (Moser, 1996) [15]. It is embedded at the micro-institutional level, for example, rights or claims that are derived from the community or local group. It also denotes the association or affiliation of the people with friends or local organization, through which the community is able to get the support or help they need. NGOs make a tremendous contribution in building the social capital of the community. Promoting the livelihood of people, by way of constituting self help group is an apt example to illustrate the contribution of NGOs in influencing social capital.

SIFFS had made relief and rehabilitation efforts in various ways as a response measure to tsunami. Boat building and repairing were the major activities of SIFFS. It has been of major assistance to the fishing community by providing information on fishing, marketing, etc. Expansion of the society network was a major contribution of SIFFS in terms of building social capital. In the fishing villages of Nagapattinam, formation of new societies by SIFFS gained impetus. Thus with the support of the fishing societies formed by SIFFS, the fishing folk of Tarangambadi, Arcattuturai, and Chinnangudi villages of Nagapattinam were able to resume their fishing activity after the tsunami. Societies were also formed in Vanagiri and Poombukar villages of Nagapattinam, and billing process and fish auctions are carried on by the societies. Apart from forming societies, SHGs were also formed among the women of the fishing community. Thus formation of SHGs and societies had helped the fishing folk in reviving their livelihood. The community found better price for their goods, as the societies stand in protecting and securing their rights and claims. Democratic values and principles are being followed in the efforts of such societies. The support of the society has also contributed to strengthening the capabilities of fishing community and high level of fishermen participation is evident in decision making processes. [16]

Through these case studies, it is evident that NGOs play a commendable role in promoting disaster resilience. The contribution of NGOs by way of its intervention in terms of providing micro-finance, formation of SHGs, skill enhancement training, infrastructure building, land reclamation, etc., are all promising measures in bringing back the victims to normalcy. Though the issue of rights and capability are not directly addressed in the intervention, it can be said that the NGOs mentioned here were quite successful because of the focus on rights and capability in an indirect way. However, there are quite a lot of issues which are not addressed by the NGOs in an appropriate manner. The involvement of government can act as a measure in monitoring the activities of NGOs. Concentration on rights, claims of people, information, skills, resources and opportunities forms a key strategy of the NGOs in bringing resilience. Apart from this responding to the needs of the people, cooperation with government sectors, involvement in development practice, etc. can enhance the sustainability of the efforts of NGO intervention. [17]

### ***Critical Gaps in Intervention***

The case study reveals that NGOs have played a tremendous role in building a disaster resilient community by laying the focus on the aspect of livelihood. However, there are some cross cutting issues that have to be addressed to properly. It cannot be overlooked that the interventions of most of the NGOs that generated the interest of the community towards work

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were only short lived. It lacked sustainability. But at the same time, NGOs did bring to table the technical expertise that contributed in improving the capability of the people.

The livelihood initiative provided and promoted by NGOs, though contributed till the rehabilitation phase, lost its essence beyond the project period, as the follow-up was not appropriately made. The community members who learnt new ways of livelihood options couldn't continue it for a longer time, as they only got the initial training from NGOs and were not able to get the required add-on support, to sustain the new means of livelihood learnt. [18]

Most of the NGOs concentrated on the skill development of the community in order to promote the livelihood of the community. However, such programmes missed out the promotion aspects, in terms of financial arrangement, training to the entrepreneurs, marketing and management skills, etc. Though there were measures for promoting micro-finance, it lacked the impetus on a long-term basis. In most of the cases, the skill development centres of the NGOs were under-utilised by the community members.

There was lack of future plans and predictions, which reduced the impact of the intervention programmes, however effective it might or could have been. The interventions are meant to serve the community and prepare them accordingly, so that they are able to cope up and manage future disaster situations. However, the efforts of NGOs served only the temporary purpose of coping and managing the tsunami of 2004. It is quite sceptical whether people would be able to handle a disaster with the intervention programme provided to them, if a disaster occurs in the future. [19]

In order to address the above mentioned gaps, the first and foremost attention should be laid on promoting the mental makeup of the community. Without addressing this issue, whatever may be the magnitude of future disasters and however effective may be the investment and interventions made for the community, it would by and large a futile exercise. Thus, the long-term perspective has to be engrained in the minds of the people about the training and other intervention programmes. Such measures could only to make remaining programmes of this order a success.

The training programmes of NGOs should inculcate among the clientele the perspectives of human rights so that people are aware of their rights and are in a position to demand their rights. Strengthening the capability of the people and awareness on rights should be imbibed in the minds of the people along with the commitment for willingness to participate and contribute for their own development. Once accomplished, the expertise of the NGOs, along with the support of the government and the active involvement and willingness of the people, would hasten the process of livelihood promotion and goes beyond that and contributes to building a resilient community. [20]

## CONCLUSION

This study, in a humble way, has stressed on the integration of the human right based approach and capability approach in the processes of moving towards development of the disaster vulnerable community. If NGOs and other institutions focus on this aspect in providing their services to the community, their vision, mission and goal of attaining resilience could be successful.

People affected by disasters have the right to live with dignity and in the same way have the right to get assistance. In the same manner, capability of the people should also be looked at as their capability in one functioning would be complement and supplement every other functioning having been affected by a disaster.

The data generated and analysed have proved that the application of right based approach helps in increasing the effectiveness of assistance, as it involves the question of accountability of agents and thus people affected by disasters realise their rights in expecting the assistance from various players.

NGOs consider disasters as an opportunity for development. Relief associated with enhancing development in the post-disaster, recovery and rehabilitation periods has a strong multiplier effect. It is better to teach someone how to fish, rather than offering fish. In the same manner, post-disaster mechanism and measure should concentrate on improving the potential of the people by making them strong rather than making them dependent and weak. Thus, any framework that aims at effective management of disasters should make the community more independent and self-sufficient and work towards strengthening the resilience of the community.

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