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*Redefining Disaster Relief
& Rehabilitation..*

Part I

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Have you noticed how natural disasters like floods, cyclones or earthquakes are happening more frequently and in places that had never seen them before. Parts of *Rajasthan* and *Gujarat*, two states that are known for their deserts and water scarcity, were flooded in 2017. Floods in *Chennai* or *Srinagar* some years ago; these disasters were unheard of earlier but now they are part of our reality... So what do we do now?

In the last two decades, Goonj has been deeply involved in disaster relief work across India. This three-part story shares our learnings from our relief and rehabilitation work over the years.

Disasters are impartial; they can happen to anyone anywhere. We all

fall into one of the three categories - a giver, a receiver or someone involved in the process. This story talks about how something as innocuous as your old material can bring about action against disasters. It throws light on how something considered discard can make you own up to the responsibility of disaster preparedness and mitigation.

“यहाँ कौन आता है?.. इतने साल में राहत की पहली नांव देखी है..”

(Who comes here? In all these years this is the first time I have seen a relief boat) said *Lorik Manjhi* from village *Dumri, Champaran (Bihar)* when he saw Goonj's first relief boat during the 2008 floods. While it is true that floods, droughts and cyclones are annual visitors to some parts of our country, unfortunately, it does not





menstruation, menarche, periods, chums, etc. are different names that men and women world over talk about in hushed tones. We live in a world that often treats women as untouchable during menses and these women don't even have a voice to speak about it. Millions face indignity and humiliation every month as they struggle even for clean cloth as a sanitary pad. Isn't menses a monthly disaster for years at the end, for many such young girls and women?

There are of course some disasters where nature is not the culprit; the human-made disasters from *Gujarat, Muzaffarnagar, Assam* riots to the ongoing *Kashmir* crisis. Avoidable yet repeated with alarming frequency. Goonj just becomes the facilitator of relief work..

Disaster is a time of crisis for a person, when he/she loses everything. It can bring out the best and the worst in people and that's why talking about **mindful giving after disasters** has been an important part of our work throughout the year and not just after a disaster.

The reason **Goonj** is able to respond to any kind of geographical and

make them any less devastating. We are talking about millions of people, their homes, livelihood and what we imagine as normal life, snatched from them year after year.

If this sounds overwhelming and too far off, there are some silent disasters that happen all around us but still escape our attention. Notice the people on the roads in your city...doesn't matter which city you live in India. Unlike floods, in winters you and I stay warm and comfortable but someone else struggles outside in the cold in the same city. The difference is only that we have enough clothes while he/she doesn't. Now think of all the unused woollens in your home and how many lives can be saved with them.

There are some disasters that nobody wants to talk about because there is a strong culture of shame and silence around them. Menses,



cultural aspect of different disasters with the same alacrity is due to its equally vast network among the masses in the villages and the cities across India. It just intensifies this pan India network at the time of a disaster. In cities, people are the most powerful stakeholders apart from corporates, institutions, non-government organisations (NGOs), activists, government agencies, transporters etc. We not only share with them the sensitivities of giving at the time of disasters but also the specifics of giving only required essential material.

This ongoing connection means Goonj's response time for generating and channelizing disaster relief resources is much quicker. In the J&K floods, on just one appeal on social media, thousands of people reposed their faith in our relief work and contributed generously. Having worked across India on different disasters, helps Goonj evolve a localised knowledge base and a buffer of need based resources. Our widespread network of rural grassroots partner organisations helps in intelligence gathering about disaster patterns and preparedness and reaching relief



This disaster.. often left buried in local news only



Devastates millions.. every summer, across rural/slum India !!

Contribute; Tarpaulins & ropes, Dry ration (pulses, non-basmati rice, spice, sugar, oil, biscuits), Food supplements, School material (stationary, bags, water bottles etc.) & toys, Clothes (clean and wearable & new under-garments, Chappals, Umbrellas, Caps, Sun-glasses, Bed-sheets, Towels, Water storage container including jugs & buckets, ORS, Electrol, Utensils, Mats, Toiletries & sanitary pads, Mosquito nets & repellents Solar lights, torches & batteries. Also, monetary contributions for essential purchases and logistics.



GOONJ, a voice, an effort

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An initiative to provide relief to disaster affected people

material to disaster prone areas well in time.

Post disaster this network of organisations and individuals give us an accurate assessment of the damage and the needs. They become the critical last leg in the chain and as part of the community, deal sensitively with the issue of giving with dignity.

A unique aspect of Goonj's disaster relief work has been that just after a few weeks of a disaster Goonj starts to use the collected relief material as rehabilitation resource, instigating the disaster hit people to get involved in repairing their damaged schools, roads, rebuilding community buildings, repairing check dams etc. This is an important part of Goonj's hub and spoke approach to relief work. We see every disaster as an opportunity to reach out to the most far flung ignored communities. We evolved 'MY Pads' - the cloth sanitary pads in the post tsunami work from the wastage of more than 100 truckloads of disaster discard. The Kosi floods work became a genesis of many initiatives like 'Sujni' reaching income and livelihood



to hundreds of women and 'Vaapsi' and 'Chehak' initiatives were successfully fine tuned and replicated in other disasters.

What started with 5 bags of material as first response to a disaster way back in 1999, after the *Chamoli* earthquake in *Uttarakhand* has now grown to a few hundred tons in recent disasters. This scale-up has been a result of local and national level partnerships and volunteering.

So where do you come into this picture?

To be honest you are actually the building block of our disaster response. Individuals from all walks of life, the masses have been the true torchbearers of what makes this work huge and unique. Contributions ranging from ₹20 -1 million have come from people

we may never have met. It is a resounding example of people's power, affirming our belief that people listen and respond when something is said about a specific need. BUT every disaster also challenges the organisation's capacities, team and resilience.

So why are we sharing all this with you? Because Goonj wants to spread more as an idea, not just as an organisation. With more devastating disasters knocking at our doorstep, there's a lot to do for every one of us..



UPDATE FOOTNOTE

As we embark on the 25th year of our disaster response endeavours, we believe that the world has a pressing need to redefine its disaster response approach. Rather than viewing disasters as isolated incidents, it is crucial to integrate their occurrence into our broader lens of looking at development work. This necessitates a shift from a reactionary to a more responsive and proactive mindset. Recognizing this imperative, Goonj established the **Goonj Alliance for Rapid Response to Disasters (GARRD)**, a strategic alliance of diverse stakeholders anchored by Goonj.

GARRD stands as a formal cross-sectoral alliance with pre-committed resources by its members, done in non-disaster times, for rapid disaster response work. Its primary objective is to instigate a mindset change, operational mitigation, and resilience-building efforts that positively influence the disaster response ecosystem. This innovative

global framework is designed to foster a more comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative bottom-up approach to rapid and sustained disaster mitigation, relief, and rehabilitation. The urgency for *GARRD* has never been more evident, given the exponential increase in disaster losses, particularly in India, one of the most disaster-vulnerable regions exposed to floods, cyclones, droughts, and earthquakes. *GARRD* encompasses the dual mission of addressing immediate losses triggered by disasters, such as loss of life and infrastructure, as well as building linkages between these impacts and the root causes of these disasters, with multiple stakeholders, in non-disaster times. Through this alliance, Goonj aspires to bring about a transformative impact on the entire disaster response system, striving for a more resilient and proactive approach to disaster management.