

## Executive Summary: Disaster Preparedness in Tamil Nadu

### Background

The world over disaster preparedness or disaster risk Reduction (DRR) is becoming the most prominent theme for Disaster Management. It is not possible to eliminate the possibility of disasters. However, with due care and proper preparation, the risks and damages from disaster can be reduced considerably.

With a view to manage various disasters in the country, Government of India enacted the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DMA), framed (2009) a National Policy on Disaster Management (Policy) and issued various guidelines on the subject to the states. The DMA provides for continuous and integrated process of planning, coordination and implementation of the policies in a holistic and sustainable manner.

Tamil Nadu which has a long coast line of about 1,076 Kilometres is frequently subjected to devastation by natural calamities like cyclonic storms and flooding due to its location in a highly vulnerable part of peninsular India. On an average Tamil Nadu faces one or two severe cyclones during the north east monsoon period. Even during the non-cyclonic phase the state receives copious rainfall as a result of formation of low pressure/ depressions in Bay of Bengal.

### Audit Objectives:

The objective of Performance Audit were to check whether;

- The state/district disaster preparedness strategy , action plans and policies have been prepared in consonance with the national policy and whether they were reviewed periodically;
- The various types of disaster, their potential of damage and requisite preparedness and mitigation efforts have been identified and mapped at the state/ district level;
- The State and District Disaster Management Authorities have been established by the Government and were effective in monitoring the situation in the event of disasters;

- The early warning systems and mechanisms to predict and communicate to the public about the disasters are in place and in the state of operational readiness at the state/ district level;
- Adequate manpower was provided to the statutory authorities and field offices; and
- Training and emergency exercises for disaster preparedness have been conceived and conducted at the state/ district level.

**Audit Findings:**

- The State Disaster Management Plan was not got approved from the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) which led to absence of authentic benchmark for planning and evaluation of disaster management efforts.
- The vulnerability profile of geographical areas located within the test checked districts has not been prepared and efforts to reduce the risk by disaster preparedness measures have not been spelt out.
- SDMA, the authority in the State responsible for steering and coordinating disaster management activities, did not meet even once since its constitution in September 2008 which led to non-performing of the key statutory duties such as laying down the state policy and plan for disaster management and to coordinate the implementation of disaster management activities. Further, its most important organ i.e. State Executive Committee met only once in June 2009 since its constitution in January 2009. Similarly, District Disaster Management Authorities did not meet even once in the test checked districts since their constitution. This led to absence of a robust system of steering and monitoring disaster management activities in the State.
- The emergency operation centres which are the nerve centre of early warning system were non-functional and not in the state of operational readiness in the test checked districts.
- Vulnerability assessment of the life line structures other than government buildings was not carried out in Chennai despite it falling in seismic zone III with moderate to high risk.

- As regards cyclone preparedness, identification of all-weather link roads, the areas where saline embankments were to be constructed, potential zones for expanding bio-shield based on remote sensing tools and mapping of coastal wetlands, patches of mangroves and shelterbelts was not done.
- The state has not constituted the Disaster Mitigation Fund at the state and districts level and has also not constituted the District Disaster Response Funds.

### **Recommendations**

- The State and District Disaster Management Authorities need to be provided with adequate manpower and infrastructure for carrying out their statutory mandate.
- The State and District Disaster Management Plans need to be prepared in accordance with the provisions of National Disaster Management Act.
- The Emergency Operation Centres should be made fully operational with adequate manpower and state of the art information and communication equipment.
- The Disaster Mitigation Funds at the State and district levels need to be constructed to finance the issues relating to disaster preparedness.
- Earthquake vulnerability assessment and earthquake preparedness measures need to be commenced and completed at the earliest.