

KERALA FLOODS: THE TISS RESPONSE

The recent floods in Kerala have severely impacted life in the entire state. The manner in which the people of Kerala— the government, civil society organisations, the armed forces, the NDRF and a large number of volunteers, and ordinary people, from all walks of life— have rallied to rescue, evacuate, set up relief camps and provide a very wide range of services in midst of serious limitations caused by the weather and inundation of settlements and landslides, has been exemplary.

The grit, discipline, organisation and restraint demonstrated by the people across districts are unprecedented as they continue to work relentlessly to reach out to save lives and to provide relief. Kerala has a well functioning and decentralized governance structure and all efforts must be made to work with the government, civil societies, local communities and vulnerable groups.

The TISS has had a history of responding to disasters and the aim has always been to contribute in ways that add value and relevance in select areas, based on its own capacity and expertise, and the emerging short-term and long-term requirements. As in the past the approach of TISS would be to leverage the networks that it has in Kerala and work through partnerships.

A Steering Committee (members listed below) has been set up under the leadership of the Ag Director, which will guide the TISS response. The first meeting was held on 20th August where Prof. Andharia presented a guiding note developed by the JTSDS faculty. Based on this note and the ensuing discussions the Committee identified a number of prospective tasks as follows:

1. Identify relief gaps in select districts and sectors/areas and develop plans on plugging them.
2. Work on trauma counseling and post disaster psychosocial care. Training community based volunteers in this area (Kerala has had a community based mental health programme. Partnering with Schools of Social Work across Kerala is a possible way forward).
3. Medical treatment, disease surveillance and creating visual aids on dos and don'ts to prevent disease and epidemics (by the School of Health Systems Studies in TISS).
4. Engagement with local communities on livelihood interventions especially with marginalized communities and most vulnerable people may be envisaged.
5. Rapid assessment of affected Panchayats with a special focus on groups at risk of being excluded in the enumeration and assessment processes.
6. Support in setting district and sub-district level mechanisms for addressing grievances and working with government systems on redressing the same expeditiously.
7. GIS and RS work may be initiated in consultation with the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (using diverse data, creating maps for land-use and other infrastructure, planning and analysis in partnership with communities- data presentation with regard to impact, government response, critical infrastructure and their help with monitoring status). TISS may also partner with other agencies in Kerala with the requisite expertise for completing these tasks.
8. Some of the key social sectors where sustained work would be needed are– health, sanitation, education, waste management, landuse planning and resettlement of people currently displaced. Faculty members from the Institute with expertise in the specific sectors can potentially get involved in areas where a clear need for support is seen.

This preliminary note informs about possibilities for intervention as we are receiving queries from several quarters. A scoping visit is being planned by a small team of TISS faculty early next week to initiate further work.

Shalini Bharat / Director (Acting)

Members of Committee: Profs. Shalini Bharat (Convener), Surinder Jaswal, Nasreen Rustamfram (Co-Convener), Anjali Monteiro, Janki Andharia, Shubhada Maitra, P K Shajahan, Asha Banu Soletti, Bino Paul, Rama Kumar, Anil Kumar, M P Balamurugan, Indira Pasupathy, Rajani

Konantambigi.

Email: tiss4kerala@tiss.edu