

THE DIASPORA AND DISASTERS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Indian Diaspora

Between August 8 and 20, the devastating floods in Kerala claimed nearly 500 lives, displaced over a million people, and directly affected over a sixth of the State's total population. The State government's latest report estimates the losses to be more than the State's annual plan. In the fiscal 2017-18, Kerala's annual plan outlay was pegged at 26,500 crore. Moreover, according to the just concluded [Kerala Migration Survey \(KMS\) 2018](#) — conducted by the Centre for Development Studies in Kerala — while remittances received in Kerala accounted for approximately 85,000 crore, much was used for housing and improving human development.

This was the worst flood in Kerala since 1924. In the deluge then, the State received 650 mm of rain compared to 2,344 mm this time. However, the impact was similar.

The difficult task of rebuilding the State has begun and contributions to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund (CMDRF) have crossed more than 1,680 crore. The Chief Minister is confident that the State would be able to overcome the shortage of funds by mobilising its own resources and through support from different quarters. For Kerala, the most important support system is the Malayali diaspora across the world.

According to the KMS 2018, there are over 2.1 million Malayali emigrants globally and 1.3 million return migrants. The Department of Non-Resident Keralite Affairs, headed by the Chief Minister of Kerala, looks after the welfare of the 3.4 million migrants globally, in addition to the nearly 2 million internal migrants within India. These are Keralites who have direct connections to their households — fathers, mothers, spouses, and, in some cases, elderly children. Of course, there are also Malayalis who have moved from Kerala permanently with their family and live within the country or abroad (non-residents from Kerala). They number around 2-3 million (over the last 60 years since the formation of the State in 1956).

The advantage Kerala has at this point is to engage with its migrants and diaspora who have been instrumental in rebuilding the destination economies after natural calamities and economic crises. The standing of the Malayali diaspora is evident from the extraordinary support Kerala has received from other sovereign states with large diaspora populations such as in West Asia, multinational corporations employing Malayalis, and by the diaspora itself. With the depreciation of the Indian rupee, the State can relaunch foreign currency deposit schemes such as the hugely successful India Millennium Deposit Scheme which was introduced in 2000 by the Centre to leverage higher values of foreign currencies so as to overcome financial and economic crises.

Unfortunately, 'not much attention has been paid to the role of diaspora groups in post-disaster situations. Yet, in a globalised world, the international dimensions of disaster response and recovery, and the significant policy role played by the diaspora can be critical'. For example, after the earthquake in 2010 in Haiti, 'the Haitian diaspora in the U.S. served as a conduit for doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, advisers and reconstruction planners. Haitian-Americans continue to be vital in long-term recovery — as supplies, remittances, sharing human and financial resources, lobbying governments, international organisations and corporations for disaster relief and redevelopment funding, and in facilitating eased travel restrictions'.

In Nepal, after the 2015 earthquake, the Non-Resident Nepali Association collected \$2.69 million, mobilised over 300 volunteers including doctors and nurses, and pledged to rebuild 1,000 disaster resilient houses. In the tsunami in South Asia (2004) and the Pakistan earthquake (2005), diaspora and migrant remittances flowed generously, demonstrating the counter cyclical

nature of remittances.

In Kerala, the migrant community and diaspora moved swiftly to organise an Internet-driven response. By sharing and re-sharing vital information on affected regions and people, supplies, and precautionary measures (on social media platforms), they were instrumental in expanding the flow of information that would later be used by politicians, private and military rescue operations, and relief workers.

Successful diaspora groups are among the largest contributors to the CMDRF. They will be invaluable in mobilising resources, talent, and knowledge which will be integral in rebuilding the State. For example, a Kerala Health Department report has made it clear that there will be a 100% increase in the demand for pharmaceutical drugs. These can be sourced quickest through transnational diaspora networks. As the diaspora is one of the greatest assets of Kerala, communities should improve relations with diaspora groups. Return migrants should also act as liaison agents.

Diaspora communities will also inevitably shape political and economic responses to a disaster. The linking of social capital between diaspora, civil society organisations, advocacy groups and government institutions, although necessary during rehabilitation, is bound to lead to unanticipated and undesirable outcomes. At least temporarily, the State may witness higher rates of emigration among the common people as they try to mitigate losses caused by the floods. For example, the KMS shows that migrants use over 40% of their remittances in purchasing land, construction and repayment of mortgage debt. Finally, we need to investigate the relationship between rehabilitation and migration further.

Kerala has close to 3 million migrants from other States to replace Keralites who left to West Asia (also known as replacement migration). Have they been affected by the floods? Are they likely to participate in the reconstruction of the economy of Kerala or leave for their home States for better opportunities? The preliminary results of the KMS indicate a decline in emigration. Finally, we should ask ourselves what the future of emigration, return emigration, internal migration and remittances from Kerala will be in the coming years.

S. Irudaya Rajan is Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Sign up to receive our newsletter in your inbox every day!

Please enter a valid email address.

Last week Ram Kadam, a BJP MLA from Maharashtra, told the men in an audience that if they were interested in women who didn't reciprocate the feeling,

Our existing notification subscribers need to choose this option to keep getting the alerts.

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com