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Professor Janki Andharia teaches at the Centre for Disaster Management, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai and has over 27 years of experience in the field of community organization and social development. Her areas of work focus on gender issues, environmental concerns, democratic governance, addressing diverse forms of marginalization and vulnerability. She has been involved in national and state level policymaking work and has had a long association with grassroots organisations. She graduated from the Dept. Of Urban and Rural Community Development in 1987. She was awarded the Association of Commonwealth Universities Scholarship to pursue her Ph.D from School of Environment Sciences, University of East Anglia U.K. in the area of Gender, Development and Environment.

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Until 2006, she was Head, Department of Urban and Rural Community Development before moving on as Chairperson of the newly created Centre for Disaster Management. She has provided leadership in the area of Disaster Management within TISS, introducing a full-fledged Masters in this field. The programme is located within the broad framework of social and environmental justice. Professor Andharia serves on the Steering Committees of the National Disaster Management Authority of India several organizations.

Over the years Professor Andharia has conducted research, trainings and consultancy assignments for governments, industry and NGOs and international agencies. She has traveled abroad to several countries to deliver special lectures, establish institutional linkages with Universities and also on research collaboration. She has published extensively and is editor of the JTCDM Working Paper Series since 2007.



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Q: We'll start right at the beginning. TISS has been involved in disasters since 1948; specially when the Kurukshetra rehabilitation...why do you think TISS which is an educational institute involves itself in disaster management? Where do you think it began? How does it go about it?

JA: TISS has essentially been a university with a difference and the focus has been on applied work. That was its genesis that we wanted to reach out to reach out to people who migrated from rural areas to cities in search of jobs and one of the critical roles that the institute has played is to respond to people in crises situations. And over a period of time this became a sort of a unique activity of the institute where, whenever there were disasters, students and faculty members would respond as corporate citizens and reach out to people in crisis. This role over a period of time became sharper and this tradition continued and culminated in the year 2006 in setting up the center for disaster management.

Q: What role do you think universities of higher education can play in relief and rehabilitation work as compared to NGOs?

JA: If we take a broader look at the role of higher education, university systems are expected to bring about change in society particularly in a country like India where we aspire to bring about structural changes through democratic means. And university systems in higher education are expected to disseminate specialized knowledge and skills in various fields. So disaster management would be a critical area of work for an institute like TISS. And TISS has been able



to therefore demonstrate the role that educational institutes play in providing value education and critical thinking through involvement in disasters.

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Q: So when an institute or an organized body like TISS sends its team into the field then how is their work different than a random volunteer work? How is the approach on the field different than unorganized voluntary work?

JA: In TISS you have faculty members who are trained in understanding the social context, faculty members with specialized people skills and reaching out to communities is something that faculty members specialize in and they are able to become role models for students and work closely with communities. The ability to understand people's situation with sensitivity, to understand forces at play, for example there would be political dynamics that unfold in any disaster situation. Being able to work through political dynamics is something that TISS is able to do pretty effectively. That is one part. The other aspect is we at the Institute; we do believe that young people have a lot of idealism . Young people are talented and young people have phenomenal creativity. Now, the ability to channel these forces is something that faculty members who volunteer to go out and work in situations of disasters, whether it's the Bhopal gas tragedy or whether it's the Orissa supercyclone or Jambhulpada floods which are more local, this is something that faculty members are able to demonstrate and students and faculty actually work together as a team.



Q: How do you think the student and faculty relationship in the field becomes different as opposed to in the classroom? You think students learn more on the field during...is it a more real life situation or...how does the rapport change?

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JA: I think when you work in a post disaster context, the barrier between students and faculty really kind of breaks down and you're working together as a team...and people with very diverse skills and ideas, you need people who can think on their feet and this is something that you're able to establish beautifully in a disaster situation. You could be staying for instance together in one single in refugee camps or you could be staying in relief camps, you could be staying maybe in huts with local communities. So it's a situation which really means that you're reaching out to communities and you're demonstrating that. And you live with people and so on so there's a huge bonding, camaraderie and a sense of...teamwork that you would see in disaster situations. And you are also one with people in very many ways. Its one thing to teach about empathy in the classroom, but when you actually go out there and work with people you are able to...it's also a situation where disasters give you an opportunity to recognize, you know human spirit, and the whole idea of resilience which we talk about today is something that we've seen. To give you an example, we were, after the Gujarat earthquake, in a village called Jhobari. . There was a woman who was standing in the middle of rubble that was once her home and she had lost two of her daughters, young daughters, and she was picking up whatever she could salvage and here she was talking to us about what had happened and so on and they're a pastoral community and she offered us mawa, which is what they make and sell and it was there in a corner somewhere and



she said....so the idea of hospitality is something that you could still see and despite the calamity, she was interacting with us and she was not somebody who was probably you know kind of crying and saying that well this is what's happened to me. We asked her specifically, is there anything that you need and she said, "No, I don't need anything." I think this spirit that you see of people is something that is worth...is something that you begin to recognize only when you interact with people in those sorts of situations. It's one thing to teach in the classroom that, well, people are not helpless, you need to recognize that people have agency, that the community is the first responder, that people do...people do manage their lives and situations and the idea of people being helpless in disasters is something that we do challenge, but to actually experience this is a different...to experience all this is something which is heart warming and this kind of skill development or understanding disaster situations in perspective can only happen in the field, no matter how much you read about it, the experience is something that you would value. So, both for students and for faculty members, the process of skill development, developing insights about what unfolds in a post disaster context is something that becomes extremely live and relevant when you actually work in the field.

The involvement in post- disaster situations offers rich learning to both students and faculty members. Students learn about administration, they learn about networking, co-ordination, political dynamics, and the role that political parties come in and play. Being able to work through those dynamics is a challenge this is something that students learn very effectively in the field. Students also learn to deal with feelings of people who have been affected by a crisis and that's the area where we have been able to work on the idea of psychosocial care and support in post disaster situations. The work began at least 15 years ago and it is only now that it's being



recognized and there's a healthy interest in enhancing skills and expertise in this area and TISS has done path breaking work in this field as well.

Q: How has TISS' work in the field evolved over so many years? How the strategies changed?

JA: TISS essentially started as a relief...providing relief. We just went to a village or a given area and did whatever was required to be done, maybe we were distributing rice or dal or being actively involved in providing relief. In some instances we were also involved in, in very few cases, but I've heard of stories from faculty members that they were actually involved in burning dead bodies or disposing dead bodies particularly in the erstwhile East Pakistan, the Bangladesh war for liberation. When faculty members and students went there, it was a small group. They actually had to work on disposal of dead bodies as well. So...of course people come back with a very deep impact on looking at the kind of suffering, the kind of crisis people go through in the context of war and it also helps build a more humanitarian outlook towards situations. It's easy to criticize and say well war is something which we should avoid but experiencing the devastation and what a war does is something that's extremely...it's something that affects people in very deep ways. So, we moved from providing relief to getting involved in enumeration work. So that was one major shift particularly in the context of Bhopal gas tragedy and in the post Latur earthquake we were involved in enumeration process. Rapid assessments are something that we were involved in. Looking at our work, the government felt that this was something that TISS could be roped in to do and we were asked to do a very detailed enumeration in the Killari earthquake.



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Now...the challenges of working on large data sets, I think those were days when we were still beginning to kind of computerize data and information. It was not something that was easy and dealing with thousands and thousands of questionnaires was a huge challenge. And the backhand work was also enormous. So TISS had to get involved in this process and very detailed reports were produced which carried a certain amount of credibility. Having seen our work in the enumeration process or panchnama work and so on, the Government of Maharashtra decided that we could be involved as community participation consultants in the 52 villages that were to be relocated. Now this in some ways was a watershed because we were now being requested to come in and work on a more long term basis on rehabilitation. It meant we were recruiting a field team over a five year period. It meant working very very closely with the bureaucracy. It also meant training local governments in participatory processes. Now...if we look at what was going on at Latur...we worked closely with the government trying to establish systems in place. If the idea was to institutionalize participatory processes in post disaster rehabilitation work, it was a novel idea at that time. One of the challenges was to create institutions at the grassroots level. The panchayat elections hadn't taken place in many years and to say that you believe in democratic ways of participation, you needed local bodies. You needed those local bodies to assume responsibility to play that role of reaching out to people with information about relief programmes. You needed the panchayat to actually consult with people from different castes and communities, take their views and build them into the rehabilitation programme at the grassroots level. You did not have these panchayats at that time that were in a position to take up that sort



of a responsibility. We then came up with this idea of forming village level committees. The government was in the process of consulting with various stakeholders in addition to TISS and one of the things that we worked closely on was the whole idea of creating village level rehabilitation committees.

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The idea found acceptance and special government resolutions were passed to constitute these village level rehabilitation committees which became the nodal entity to work on rehabilitation processes, the packages, the relief packages that were created by the government, they were to be disseminated, things were to be transferred through these village level communities. Now, the challenge was that since these village level rehabilitation committees didn't exist, we had to start off by constituting them and that was a long arduous process. Since we believed in participatory processes we also needed to talk to these village level...a) constitute those village level committees, b) train the. Train them on what is likely to unfold, how they would deal with conflicts, what are the issues that are likely to come up at the village level. These are things that people knew very well and working through those processes was extremely critical. So we had...we employed community level workers who were trained, we had senior level faculty members also involved in this whole process where if there were conflicts, they had to be addressed. If there were issues, caste conflicts, these had to be addressed in a process where you convene in Gram Sabha meetings, village level meetings and worked through resolution. So these were hugely challenging experiences for TISS, so you see, there's a shift from working on relief to working on long term rehabilitation.



After the 1984 riots where TISS was actively involved in Shivaji Nagar, there is a very interesting incident which was narrated by a new faculty member who was joining TISS. She got off at Dadar early hours of the morning and she came to TISS and the taxi driver refused to take...accept the fare saying that anyone who works in this institute, he wouldn't charge them simply because he had seen the kind of work TISS had done in the post-riot situation in Shivaji Nagar. This, to my mind is a testimony to the ways in which we impact people ;the kind of social and moral statement that we make through our interventions which influences people very deeply. Because it is something which is extremely unusual and again very heart warming that a person who had seen the work of TISS...I think what's also very interesting is that they recognize that this was a TISS team because there were lots and lots of people doing disaster response work, so obviously there was some difference that he would have noticed, or people would have seen which is why...this is to my mind a tribute to the kind of work TISS has been doing.

Q: TISS has involved itself in so many disasters, almost all major national disasters. What have been the challenges in the field where difficulties have been faced and what were the strategies to sort of overcome them?

Part 5

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When the tsunami hit the Andaman and Nicobar islands, I happened to be in Port Blair, on leave, and the Director called up and said that see how we can help out and look at what TISS can do. I started off by trying to meet the chief secretary and parked myself there for couple of days actually, talking to people, telling them that TISS could come in and help out and what was it that we could do. Of course there in Port Blair, there was no one understanding of what TISS could do, and it required a lot of perseverance and a lot of talking with various senior bureaucrats to say that we could help out in A, B, C, D activities. Appropriate letters were sent to the Chief Secretary, by the director and over a period of time, we were able to get them to tell us that yes, you would be, you could help us in various ways. But the administration had to actually go through those motions of the challenge of working on enumeration, it didn't know where to begin, the distance from Port Blair to Nicobar Islands was huge, connectivity was severely affected, and people in the administration had never really dealt with a disaster of this magnitude.

One of the areas where we provided help which they gratefully acknowledged was to prepare checklists of how to set up relief camps. There was a middle level bureaucrat who said "I have been told to set up relief camps. Can you tell me where to begin? And I remember sitting at his computer and typing out a list of things he need to identify and make sure and he needs to take care of and we made several copies and they were given out. So there were little things like that where there were simple tips or, and we came with some experience, and one was able to use that experience, and share it with the administration. Little things led to them accepting that yes, we could use TISS's help. At the same time there was a certain kind of skepticism, that what can an academic institution do,



But because, I mean I believe that TISS does enjoy a lot of credibility with the governments, one could actually say we have worked in Gujarat, we have worked in Latur, we have worked in various scenarios and with various state governments, it was a point with which we could negotiate our help. We had several meetings with the lieutenant governor then, the director flew down with a team of faculty members and we tried very hard to discuss and get permission to travel to the southern group of islands which were more severely affected. Now...the Nicobar group of islands are restricted areas and you require what is known as a travel permit to access those areas. So there was also a fair amount of reluctance on part of the administration to give access to TISS to those areas because there were sensitivities. There were also probably defense issues which would be involved and so on. And no one really wanted to kind of take a decision which could boomerang on them later on. But with a fair amount of persuasion, we said we would go to islands where there was a maximum need. And initial data indicated that the maximum casualties were on Katchal Island which is a large island and there weren't adequate number of people to help out with relief work there. So we said we will volunteer to go there. So we took a position that we are willing to go anywhere and our intent is to help out in whichever way the government would want us to. Now in choosing one of the worst affected islands we were also communicating that we were ready for whatever needed to be done. The decision that we took at the institute level was that in Andaman and Nicobar Islands only faculty members and M.Phil, PhD students would go whereas, in the mainland, in Tamil Nadu and other places, we had Masters Students also volunteering and working. Now this was precisely because the challenges involved in working in remote areas, there were number of kind of constraints. One of the constraints was also financial because flying a large number of people to, from Bombay to Port Blair and then to other islands was something that we had not dealt with earlier. We were



asked in fact to get permissions from the Home Department and the integrated defense services needed to clear us in order to work in those areas and also to use what are known as the IL-32s. These are large aircrafts and the government was flying these aircrafts and carrying relief workers at minimal cost. But you needed to be cleared; you needed clearance and permission from the home department. So I went across to the home dept. spoke to people there. What also helps is the fact that one of the senior officers there was someone who had worked in the Orissa super cyclone and he had seen TISS' work and I mean I happen to know him personally and he was very supportive of the TISS team going there.

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And we got the necessary permits and permissions so all of us went on this IL-32 which was an armed forces aircraft...I think that helped, that really helped that...because otherwise we didn't have the resources at that stage to fly a team in. From Port Blair we then had to travel to Katchal Island. When we reached the Island we found that there was one special relief officer and a small contingent of police force who were struggling with enumeration. They were being told constantly that you know please give us information about; give us data because Delhi was asking for data. And the special relief officer kept saying I cannot, I really don't have people to do this kind of enumeration work and when we reached we said that we will help out with the enumeration work and we prepared questionnaires, we, I mean these are things which we did right there. We helped out with systematizing relief camps; we had a very interesting team of people who worked on various issues. This was another situation where we had to prove our credibility on ground. Extremely challenging circumstances. The special relief officer said I have



no accommodation for you, you will have to find your own accommodation and we actually stayed in huts that were abandoned by some agricultural workers in...But all we needed was really a roof on our heads, so I think we also operated with this. You don't have to worry about us, we can live where people live, and that's really something that we, we operate with those principles that wherever there are people, we should be able to live. I mean that's the challenge and I think our social work education or you know the whole community processes that we train our students for trains us for some of these situations. Now, we started off with the enumeration process. We also did photo documentation of every household and every family that had survived which was extremely valuable. Now, the boats were gone. There was just one boat that was plying there and we had to go to an area which is known as Upper Katchal. It's about an hour from one part of the island to...it takes you about two hours by, one and a half hours by boat. Now, the SRO told us that yes, we are looking at say these households which were in Katchal. There was one part he said, were there are several villagers and we have had no contact with them.

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And it was I think about, maybe about a month and he says we just don't know what the situation is out there and we need people to go there. Now if there was just this one boat and the boatman said I will take you there but we have to set out by 2 o' clock because the sea gets choppy after that. And the boat had no life jackets or it didn't have any of the safety equipment, it didn't even have tyres. Normally, you know in remote parts what they would have are old tyres which can kind of double up as life saving equipment, but he was a very experienced boatman so Dahisaro



said the challenges are huge, who will go, who will volunteer and...Would your people volunteer? So we took a call and we had a meeting and we decided that yes, we should be able to do it because well if it has to be done, it has to be done and we agreed to take on this task and we found that the settlements...you had...in Upper Katchal you had settlements where about 5 or 6 households lived in one area, then you walked through thick forests for about 40 minutes and you come across another settlement. So there were 9 such settlements which were kind of spread out and we needed to cover them. The boatman said...we reached there at about 9 o'clock and in the morning and he said we have to set out by 2. Now, by the time we finished our work, we had, we just had about, I think it was 2 o'clock and we said there are you know four more settlements and we had to take a call. So we said no, we will finish it. So, we finished all of that and we set out only at 5. The sea was really rough, the winds pick up and it gets dark, so there's nothing to guide you in terms of...there are no...Along the coast there's absolutely nothing and the jetties had collapsed completely. So the boatman had to navigate his boat absolutely through, kind of, experience. And I remember all of us who were on the boat, we said, well, if we capsize, we capsize, I mean we have to say goodbye kind of a thing and I think there's fear, at the same there is the enthusiasm that yeah, it's something that...I mean there's also a sense of challenge, so when you are doing disaster management work the fact that there is an inherent risk to your life is something that we all need to understand and recognize, you know. It is not something where, well, it's not business as usual or it's not working in safe havens and so on and so forth, so I think...and these are memories that the local community carries. These are memories that the SRO kind of...he felt absolutely delighted that TISS was able to do this kind of work which he said my own officers would never have done. So I think there were some of these very fascinating experiences.



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With this kind of data. I want to say something here. The way rehabilitation process was unfolding, we were very clear that it was important for the government to build temporary shelters and permanent shelters which were culturally appropriate. We have had any number of instances where the government builds typical; you know 225 sq feet houses, completely inappropriate and unlivable for any local community. Now, interestingly we had chief secretaries at that time, there was a transfer and so on and we were discussing a rehabilitation policy and we were asked I don't know if I should say this in camera but we were asked to help out with financial calculations of what it would entail if we went in for wooden houses. That means you needed to provide wood and implements to local communities so that they could build their own houses and that was something that we were advocating in a big way. The chief secretary agreed completely that yes, that is the way forward and he said, he along with the financial secretary, he said if you can help us put a report together which would indicate what the cost would be of a typical PWD house as against say providing equipment, it would be a huge tool for us to kind of advocate for local material and so on. The argument was that even if you imported Malaysian rubber, it would still have been cheaper to do wood houses. So we put together a report, it meant a lot of work, we had to get expertise, we had an architect from India, a designer in Bangalore was also working with us. He actually worked on this and this report was sent across both to the chief secretary as well as to Delhi, Unfortunately, I think the voice of PWD prevailed and we believed that yes these are some of the challenges which I think the nation has to probably address in a big way that why do we keep building PWD type of 225 sq feet houses which no



one is ever going to live in. And of course people had started rebuilding their own houses using whatever material they had and so on. These are some of the challenges that we continue to confront. How do we bring about a shift in housing policy for instance? How do we work on guidelines for recovery? Because these, these are issues, these trajectories are what every government goes through. And it's been a very painful process to see this unfold, disaster after disaster that you have temporary shelters with tin sheds, inappropriate, they get hot, the ground is not properly organized and so on and by the time you have these PWD houses it's like 5 years, by which time you know many local communities build their own houses. So I think these are some of our challenges which we continue to confront.

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