Center for Global & Strategic Studies
Islamabad

Disaster Management of Australian Bushfire

By Ms. Alisha Manzoor, CGSS Ambassador (Islamabad), Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad

Published on 04th February 2020

Australian bushfire, a climatological disaster that aroused badly, and could be mitigated or managed. Expeditious development, rapid climate change, and industrial growth made Australia more vulnerable to the bushfires. Australia recently has experienced a temperature of 41° C and anticipated bushfire caused huge destruction to the environment and killed thousands of animals. The bushfire season starts in September, yet the previous blaze disaster was a one-day event but the recent bushfire season has seen almost 100 emergency warnings across the country and with the extreme loss of wildlife during three months.

Government Management

The Australian government managed the fire with the help of international donors, firefighters, and Australia's Disaster Management Preparedness and Response team. People were evacuated from their homes but for several months they cannot return to their homes. The Prime Minister deployed approximately 3000 soldiers of the Australian Defense Force along with the Chinook helicopters, Navy's largest amphibious ship, and other military aircraft which assisted in fire-affected areas, it was the world's largest military deployment after the World War II[1]. The Australia National Emergency Management workforce was made up of volunteers from all over the world.

[1] Mathew Abbot, "Its an atomic bomb: Astralia Diploys Military as fire spread", Jan 2020, New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/04/world/australia/fires-military.html

As all of the volunteers were on their jobs when the actual disaster strikes and it took time to reach them in the actual disaster place due to its actual assessment.

Disaster Management Funds

Due to the anticipated large extent of the disaster, Australian emergency management teams started collecting the funds very earlier and spent it on the individuals so they could cope up with the disastrous situation, but in an actual emergency, the situation became so unpredictable and out of control. The US has sent more than 160 firefighters to help the Australian government to control the bushfires. Later on, the Australian Prime Minister announced the funds for the bushfires recovery and also allocated funds to mental health recovery departments, for re-establishment of business activities, charities, and local government. Funds were allocated for the reconstruction of collapsed buildings and infrastructural demolishment. The victims were sent to the emergency accommodations and facilitated by the necessities including food items and other primary facilities.

Emergency Response

The professional firefighters were very less in number as compared to the volunteer workforce. The huge number of volunteer workforce was not enough as they didn't have the specialized equipment and training. They were rescuing individuals and animals. It was unable to control the bushfire as it was spreading very rapidly, affecting the highways, mountains and created a dense fog all over the cities. As Australia is one of the countries that suffered from extremely high temperatures, the emergency

response teams could create the high content of moisture in the soil during the warning phase but they didn't even cut the fuel-wood. On the other hand, the situation was very severe as the smoke of bushfire was spread in all the major cities and caused choking. The people were advised to stay at home and use air purifiers to protect themselves from bushfire smoke.

This catastrophic disaster had created fear in many individuals and especially children. Emergency counseling sessions were arranged for the mental therapy of victims who have suffered from post-disaster depressions, mental trauma and the ones whose behavior was not normal. It was a time taking process but it went with complete success.

It was an ecological disaster. Thousands of brutally burnt cows, sheep, koalas, kangaroos, and others were collected in one place and the disaster waste management teams loaded them in a huge truck and buried them into a long deep trench. The dumping was not enough as they can be used as natural fertilizers in the agricultural sector.

Participation of First Respondents

In the recent bushfires, the participation of the community was very little as they didn' t have an understanding as well as awareness of the fires. Bushfire disasters in Australia can be mitigated or prevented by active community participation as they were the first respondents and they can create awareness in the community and adopt preventive measures to reduce the risk. As the individuals in the community having

education, training, and equipment are the first responders to the disaster and can save the country from maximum damage

Reasons for Bushfires

The excessive temperature was not the only reason behind the bushfire catastrophe, fuel, wind, and slope equally contributed to this event. The majority of forests have un-burnt fuel for very long that also contributed to the bushfires. In the future, the forest department should cut the massive fuel loads and utilize it for economic purpose. Heavy fuel loads are created by extended periods of droughts in Australia for several years. Another major reason for bushfires is the high content of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as there is a loss of vegetation due to drought and there was no alternative for the absorption of carbon dioxide. The high property damage was due to the little buffer zone between the forest and the residential area. Most of the buildings were completely demolished due to highly non-resilient construction to fire and the building codes were not based on bushfire disaster management.

Preventive Measures

For effective future response, the Australian government should create a national civil bushfire defense force that will be composed of employees instead of volunteers. The environment of research, especially on climate and crisis management, should be created in universities along with the establishment of separate research centers in every city. The integration of bushfire knowledge and management into the school curriculum is also needed as it enables the children to remain calm during an actual

emergency and they can develop ideas to prevent it. Bushfires are directly associated with climate change and the risk of fires in the future is very high. For this purpose, the respondents will be well prepared and always remain up to date to actively respond to any kind of mishap. Public funded education should be initiated for the landlords, farmers and local people regarding bushfires.

To realize the largest bushfire in the history of Australia that ended up into the extremely huge destruction due to shortage of resources. It will give strength to the Australian emergency response teams to extend its resources as well as members to cope with future disasters and study all the previous trends of bushfires thoroughly to develop an effective coping mechanism for future risk reduction.