

## Picking up the pieces

The Tata group has always put the needs of the nation and the communities it serves above its own. This concern is particularly evident during times of distress, when the disaster response team of the Tata Sustainability Group (TSG) mobilises resources to serve the needs of the afflicted. Working under the guidance of Ajit Chaudhuri, assistant vice president, TSG, the team consists of Shirrang Dhavale, deputy general manager, and Aahna Srikanth, deputy manager.



Mr Chaudhuri says, "When a disaster strikes, the group works hard to meet its responsibilities to the affected communities. We reach out to the worst affected, managing relief and rehabilitation activities, acting in unison through the One Tata response."

The relief and rehabilitation exercises are managed by Tata employees working in association with government agencies, village panchayats and civil society organisations. Non-governmental organisations offer medical support, trauma counselling and psychosocial first aid. They also create safe spaces for children in the aftermath of a disaster.



TSG trains the employees to handle their duties as project managers, procurement specialists and volunteers. Of these, the project managers manage on-ground relief operations. They are supported by procurement specialists who manage the purchase of material and organise warehouse and logistical issues. Large numbers of employees from across group companies also serve as volunteers. General volunteers are a part of relief teams, while specialist volunteers bring in specialised knowledge about the disaster-affected region.

Mr Chaudhuri says, "The One Tata response is bolstered by the Tata Community Initiatives Trust which has systems and procedures in place for disaster response. Besides, Tata companies help us with local knowledge and resources such as warehouses and administration support. Companies with specialised expertise help wholeheartedly." The latter group includes companies like Tata Power and Tata Power Delhi Distribution for the restoration of electricity, Tata Hitachi for road clearance, Tata Steel, Tata Consulting Engineers and Tata Realty for construction, etc.

Combining the efforts of these forces is a huge task, requiring coordination and accountability. In the event of a disaster, the group chief sustainability officer reaches out to the group Chairman and the MDs of companies. TSG already has a system in place with a lead Tata company in every state to manage disaster response along with a forum called the Tata State Disaster Response Platform, consisting of all Tata companies operating in a state.



Following a disaster, the teams swing into action, looking into short term relief and long-term rehabilitation. "Typically," Mr Chaudhuri says, "relief operations go on until 6 months after a disaster and are directly managed by Tata personnel. They assume 10 to 25 percent of allocated financial resources. The remaining funds are used during the rehabilitation phase, which goes on for 5-6 years after the disaster. This stage is often managed by third parties and monitored by the Tata group."

Working with its own resources and in collaboration with government and non-government organisations, TSG never loses sight of the goal it has set for itself. Mr Chaudhuri says, "We work in the worst-affected areas and with the worst-affected communities. We strive to be partners in the rebuilding of lives and livelihoods in the aftermath of a disaster."

— *Cynthia Rodrigues*

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