Disaster Management in Gujarat

The pace of development in Bhuj, Gujarat following the disaster in 2002 has been unprecedented. Development banks and state governments have invested vast sums in infrastructure. Land has become an attractive investment.

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Does Gujarat Model is replicated anywhere?

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- In Bhuj's rebuilding, the Gujarat approach is widely looked at as a **model for reconstruction**.
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- From the recent post-earthquake reconstruction in Nepal in 2015 to the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, the Gujarat model is widely replicated.
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- Yet, although the model is celebrated, it is vital to highlight certain concerns flattened in the Bhuj plan.
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What are the problems in Gujarat Model?

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- Any relief programme needs to be based on proper assessments of needy and vulnerable groups.
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- But the rehabilitation packages announced soon after the Bhuj disaster offered unequal treatment to various categories of earthquake-affected people.
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- Those who'd suffered equally in terms of damages were given **unequal amounts of aid.**
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- The size of agricultural lands was also adopted as one of the criterias for assistance given.
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- Places nearer the epicentre received higher assistance. Relief provisions also accorded more assistance for completely collapsed houses in urban areas than rural locations.
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- Pre-earthquake house sizes were taken into consideration; that meant richer people were likely to derive larger benefits.
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Is the model is biased?

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- Post-earthquake development was envisaged to attract investment and create a corporate sector.
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- In the process, the informal sector was pushed to less valuable, less visible spaces.
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- Post-disaster development planning also completely ignored the entitlements and rights of the landless.
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- The pro-rich, anti-poor bias of development plans in terms of land use became clear in the imagination of a new Bhuj.
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- The entitlement of land for the urban poor, who perform important functions, is critical — by changing such settlements, development snatched away entitlements.
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- Expensive public land in Bhuj has been given to better-off residents; land inhabited by the poor in Rabari was acquired for government offices.
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- To improve public transport, Bhuj roads were widened; this adversely affected hawkers and other occupiers of public space, who were evicted.
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- The 60 per cent population of Bhuj town, who lived in 32 unauthorised pockets outside Kotvistar for over 25 years, did not receive any compensation from the government as they didn’t possess requisite land entitlement (legal claim on the land).
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- The **Waghri community (mainly comprising of Muslim labourers)** residing near Dadupeer Road for generations was also driven out, on the pretext of encroachment.
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What is the situation in relocated villages?

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- In Bhuj's relocated villages, the situation isn't different. Most relocation has been done on agricultural land acquired from other villages.
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- Some villagers either lost land or were relocated far away. The new villages are also larger; this meant expensive infrastructure, again "provided" by the government.
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- But what wasn't thought of was the lack of village committees' financial resources to maintain this infrastructure; local village committees had to increase taxes, which many villagers can't afford. House allocation on the size of land holdings also created new disparities.
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- While NGOs emerged as a significant stakeholder in rehabilitation, **local self-governing bodies like panchayats and municipalities were not sufficiently empowered.**
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- As Bhuj shows, disaster management practice in the country remains highly technical and instrumental — the current model does not have any effective policy framework to address social exclusion and the marginalisation of the poor.
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Way ahead:

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- Any discussion on disaster management must address the proper assessment and identification of vulnerable groups.
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- Reconstruction doesn't mean only rebuilding houses but rebuilding lives, particularly of the weak. That alone leads to real development.
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