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CASE STUDY

A coastal state in India is suffering from the catastrophe of flood. The damage caused by the flood is huge, which includes hundreds of deaths, displacement of lakhs of people, and damaged infrastructure. The state government requested the Centre to provide a sum of amount for the flood relief, but the Centre sanctioned less than half of what the state government requested.

Amid the ongoing human catastrophe of the floods, many countries and global institutions have voluntarily offered assistance as a goodwill gesture in solidarity with the disaster victims. However, the central government refused to accept any assistance on the basis of an earlier policy decision.

The state requested the central government for acceptance of the aid from foreign countries but the centre denied. Later, they urged the Centre to provide additional funds, however this was not acceded to. The state government and its citizens are miffed with this decision of the centre. Given the circumstances,

- a) Identify the ethical issues involved in this case.
- b) Do you think India should accept foreign aid during such disasters? Justify our stand.

Approach:

- **Introduce the case.**
- **Identify the stakeholders involved in the case.**
- **Identify ethical dilemmas involved in the case.**
- **Identify ethical issues involved in the case.**
- **Give arguments in favour of and against accepting foreign aid and take a stand.**
- **Provide justification for your stand.**

Answer:

The case involves challenges at the front of ethics in international relations, strengthening federalism and providing satisfactory rescue, relief and rehabilitation assistance to the disaster victims.

Stakeholders Involved In The Case

- The disaster victims.
- The central and state government.
- The foreign countries and international institutions offering aid.
- Citizens at large.
- Environment.

Ethical Dilemmas Involved In The Case

- Policy of uniformity vs. empathy and Justice for disaster victims/objectivity.
- Sovereignty vs. cooperative federalism.

Ethical Issues Involved In The Case

- **Damage caused by the disaster:** The catastrophe of flood is also the result of poor disaster management planning and poor governance in India. Environmental ethics has also been ignored. All this is due to lack of responsibility on part of all of us.
- **Against the ethos of constitution:** Centre's unilateral decision to not let humanitarian assistance reach a needy State also does not befit the federal character of the country as mentioned in the constitution. Consultations with the stakeholders is required.
- **Foreign relations:** By refusing the humanitarian assistance, we are drifting from the concept of "one for all and all for one" in foreign relations.
- **Sovereignty:** As aid money comes with strings attached, explicit or implicit. Thus, there can be an element of sovereignty issue and new colonization. There is a question of whether the offer of aid is end in itself or it is the means to achieve an end.
- **Humanism:** The case has elements of violation of human rights like, right to life, right to healthy environment, right to basic facilities, etc.

Arguments Against Accepting The Aid

- **Uniformity in policy:** The strongest argument maintaining uniformity of policy based on the past policy and practice.
- **National pride:** It gives a sense of national pride that India is a not a poor country and hence it doesn't need anyone's charity. Also, India has established itself as a net foreign aid donor, not recipient.
- **Self-sufficiency:** India is self-sufficient and hence does not need outside aid.
- **Sovereignty:** In the past, foreign aid came with demands of economic restructuring or resetting governance priorities, and an occasional sermon on human rights. Such aids can have adverse impact on India's sovereignty.
- **Lack of governance:** Simply pouring more money into a situation where the real constraint can be capacity/governance does not lead to better outcomes.

Arguments In Favour Of Accepting The Aid

- **Legal status:** The legal framework in India (NDMA, 2005) is positively inclined to coordinating with external agencies and institutions for disaster relief.
- **Negative attitude:** The adversarial attitude towards foreign aid due to past experience reflects a sense of insecurity and paranoia.
- **No question of ego/pride:** The countries reeling under natural calamities routinely accept emergency aid from other countries irrespective of how rich or poor they are.

- **Prejudices:** There is a fundamental difference between funding with strings attached and humanitarian assistance. Hence, thorough assessment of the intension of assistance should be done instead out rightly rejecting all aid offers.

What Should India Do

- India needs to assess the requirement of the funds for immediate relief, long-term rehabilitation, and rebuilding of infrastructure.
- First, it should try to provide assistance from its own resources as much as possible either from official or non-official sources.
- If India is able to fulfill its immediate relief needs, it should politely refuse the aid.
- If it is not possible to provide adequate assistance for immediate relief through domestic resources, it should:
 - Make a distinction between foreign aid offered for normal periods and emergency humanitarian and reconstruction assistance on the basis of its intentions.
 - Based on that distinction, it would be better to be selective in the money we take from foreign governments.
 - If it is purely on humanitarian ground, then we can accept the aid based on our priorities.
 - We should accept aid in the crucial areas that also in kind, where state capacity is limited and weak including the delivery of public health, sanitation, and disaster relief.
 - Moreover, the assistance can be received through specific channels, where there are no elements of sovereignty involved. For example- through PMDRF or CMDRF or NGOs, civil society's etc.
- Further, for long term rehabilitation and rebuilding the infrastructure, India can take loan from global or regional financial institutions rather than taking aid.

Justification

- India is no longer a desperate country which would indiscriminately accept money from anyone for anything. Hence, selective acceptance after thorough evaluation of strings attached with aid is required.
- The argument here is not that India should seek/ receive regular foreign aid, but that it should accept foreign aid in times of humanitarian emergency because no policy can justify callousness towards our own suffering citizens.
- Immediate assistance in kind can also be taken as assessing the extent of damage and release of funds from the centre is a time-consuming process.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to evolve sensible, practical and empathetic guidelines on receiving emergency aid for the federal units in times of dire need along with bringing in good governance.

