

30 October, 2014

Letter for Nominating Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, Katra, Jammu & Kashmir for Sasakawa Award-2015

Dear Ma'am /Sir,

Greetings from India! It is great pleasure to nominate Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board for the prestigious "Sasakawa Award-2015."

I have had the pleasure to have known the organization Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board-India's holiest & most visited shrine towards their commitment towards Disaster Risk Reduction activities. Being in BSI we have an eye for safety standards and I can vouch that SMVDSB has been taking proactive steps in this direction since 2009. In India the DM Act was passed in 2005 that coincided with the passing of the five principles of the Hyogo Framework of Action, but the challenge was how to translate these principles into action?

In this context, Shrine Board did not want to have "another" Disaster Management Plan and fulfill the mandate but wanted some "real" changes on ground. It was an uphill task and challenges were daunting. Some of the glaring amongst them aside from being vulnerable to different types of natural & manmade hazards is also being prone to terror attacks and the large volume of pilgrims per day ranging from 20-30,000 makes the task sensitive. Besides, training an adult staff on Basic Life Skills is much harder as they have their "set-views".

Nevertheless, in 2009 they set-up on an ambitious mission to revamp things at two levels: structural & non structural changes. Structurally they embarked on abiding by safety norms and being from BSI, I can surely recommend that the new building have complied by the codes of fire safety, evacuation routes, seismic resistant while the older structures are either razed or safety norms put in place. On the other hand a practical Disaster Management Training was designed with the help of external consultants from a consulting firm :Centre for Disaster Risk Resilience and the team was led by Dr. Swati Mitra who had worked with UN Agencies personally and had the experience of program implementation in partnership with different stakeholders which made the task of Shrine Board much easier and the results are there for all of us to see after 4 years of persistent training.

To ensure inter-agency coordination staff from different agency's which comprises of the Jammu & Kashmir Police Force, Central Reserve Police Force & the Shrine Board staff were all given training on Basic Life Skills on how to administer CPR, check pulse, put the victim in recovery position, lift the victim without any help so that the "golden hour" to save the victim is achieved! Focus was on bringing " change in the mind-set" of the people. Training was practical ,hands on and this is what caught the

attention of the staff as there “real” needs were taken into consideration and this is what made the training highly participatory and not “forced” upon from the management.

The Disaster Management Plan that was actually made after the training truly became a blue-print of preparedness, mitigation & response document that could be referred during any emergency. What I appreciate is the way staff have been “involved” at every level of program implementation and with this undoubtedly comes confidence, ownership and sustainability of the program.

An in-house group of Master Trainers continue imparting training to the 4000 staff from different agency as the belt forces keep shifting every three years and new battalion comes in. The Response mechanism that forms the heart of any Disaster Management Plan is based on the Incident Command System but tailored as per the local requirement and this makes it appealing for the staff as well.

The shrine Board surely needs to be recognized for their work as it has complied to international standards at the local level and is a fine example of good governance.

Thanking you

Yours faithfully



Venkataram Arabolu

Managing Director

