

31 October 2014



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

Dear Madam/Sir,

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

I have had the pleasure to know about the work of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board and their commitment towards Disaster Risk Reduction activities. As a former UNICEF staff I had also interacted with the consultants they have engaged to implement their DRR initiatives. As such, I would like to elaborate on the nominated organisation and separately about the Consultants!

I am aware that the DRR law has been passed in which sets the framework for the Board’s work; however in a country as large as India legislation is not enough. Effective program implementation at the ground level is achieved through discussion, persuasion and partnership between the government and civil society actors. The Board’s work and accomplishments are a perfect example of the government-civil society partnership.

During my long stint in India, I am well aware that this is one of the most visited shrines in the country and kept abreast of what has been happening in India in general and the Shrine, particularly, since my departure. As you are aware, the sub-continent lies in a geographical hotspot and the Himalayan range is known to be vulnerable to different types of natural hazards and the Shrine being located in Jammu & Kashmir is also vulnerable to terror attacks. Owing to the large number of visitors per day the Shrine Board came into existence in 1986 under a law introduced by the Governor of the Jammu & Kashmir that also included a bureaucratic arrangement to govern and administer its smooth functioning. The Shrine is a dynamic place with many challenges. Located at 6,200 feet above sea-level and facing space constraints, it requires extensive planning and creativity to manage its operations. Additionally, the Shrine is prone to terror attacks, hence the huge deployment of para-military forces in the township of Katra that forms the base camp of the Holy Shrine.

When I came to know that Dr. Swati Mitra and her team have formed a consultancy under the name “Centre for Disaster Risk Resilience,” and were involved in providing technical support to the Shrine, I was confident that their intervention would be innovative and bring about many “first” time activities. For example:

- It is the FIRST time in India that a Disaster Risk Management (DRM) program was undertaken without any external funding

- It is the FIRST time that the FOCUS was on bringing a “attitudinal” change amongst the trainees towards learning Life Skills
- It is the FIRST time that a capacity building training was done following which the Disaster Management Plan was drawn, which ensured more “real” needs came out and “ownership” of the document
- It is the FIRST time that resilience of the institution was built in compliance with the principles of the Hyogo Framework of Action & the Millennium Development Goals.

All this and many more have been possible as Dr. Mitra had started her career with UNICEF in 2002 and continued in different capacities in other UN Agencies. As such, she has been able to guide the program based on core UN values of working in partnership with the government, community ownership & program sustainability -- all are reflected in her approach! As a former United Nations civil servant, I am proud that Dr. Mitra has embodied these UN principles and values in her work to support the Shrine.

Given India’s progress in development activities, I strongly feel that recognizing the Shrine’s efforts on Disaster Risk Reduction is warranted. To me, the team’s work has been exemplary in terms of implementing effective program activities, generating political commitment & maintaining good governance. I strongly urge your recognition of the Shrine , supported by the Centre team efforts – such an honour would increase public awareness of the need for disaster risk management and increase the visibility of positive actions being taken. Your recognition of the Shrine with the 2015 Award would a sign of encouragement, acceptance of the mutually beneficial nature of its presence, as well as an inspiration to others to get involved.

I know that it is a difficult task selecting an awardee, but I strongly recommend the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board for your consideration. For your reference, I have also attached a video link to support this nomination:

Download link

<http://we.tl/QMsZSYrcVS>

Cordially yours,



Erma Manoncourt, PhD
President
(retired UNICEF)