



## *Topical Issues On*

### **DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT**

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#### ***Disaster Risk Management Begins With Information***

## **ABOUT DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT**

Disasters have been in existence since time immemorial and this perhaps explains why society in general has tended to view disasters as inevitable Acts of God and punishment for transgressions. However considerable progress has been done to better understand what disasters are, why they happen and how they can be managed. A disaster is a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or society characterised by widespread human, material, economic and environmental losses beyond the ability of the affected to cope unaided. Essentially disasters are a product of hazards and vulnerability against a background of inadequate coping capacity.

Vulnerability is exposure or susceptibility to hazards due to physical, social, economic and environmental factors. On the other hand factors that reduce susceptibility and increase resilience are referred to as capacities.

Hazards have been described as any phenomenon or activity that has a potential to cause harm. The origin of the phenomenon or activity can be natural or technological commonly referred to as manmade. Technological hazards originate from industry, mining, transportation and other forms of human activity.

Natural hazards are in three categories. Weather related phenomena such as drought and floods are the most common. Geological phenomena give rise to natural hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis. Biological hazards are natural phenomena evident through disease outbreaks in humans, animals and plants. Environmental degradation may arise from either technological or natural hazards or a combination of both. A typical example of the

combined effect is the worrisome climate change.

As disasters are the culmination of inadequate capacity, then the targeting of capacity must be the focus of management in reducing risk. These efforts must be a continuous endeavour before, during and after a disaster.

#### **Before disaster strikes**

There are four key processes to be undertaken before disaster strikes

##### a) Disaster risk assessment

This is a process to determine the nature and extent of risk by analysing the prevailing and potential hazards and the existing conditions of vulnerability. This process takes into account the coping capabilities for each peculiar risk.

##### b) Prevention

This process involves outright avoidance of an identified disaster risk where possible.

##### c) Mitigation

The process involves taking measures to limit or lessen the impact of identified disaster risks. These measures can be structural or non structural. Structural measures are technical or engineering measures taken to reduce the impact of hazards. Non structural measures are policies and regulations developed to reduce risk to disaster.

##### d) Preparedness

These are measures taken to ensure effective readiness for response to disaster.

Preparedness reduces the unknowns and invokes appropriate action in case of emergency or disaster. There are three components in preparedness namely education and awareness, early warning and preparation of response plans. Education and awareness

seek to increase knowledge and skills in order to reduce exposure to hazards. This is evident through appropriate change of behaviour. Early warning is a systematic chain of events based on sound understanding of the hazard and the vulnerable. It involves monitoring and forecasting impending emergencies and disasters in order to timely disseminate accurate and meaningful warnings to populations at risk.

### **When disaster strikes**

The response plan is implemented. The aim of response is to save life, reduce suffering, ensure safety and meet the basic needs of the affected.

### **After a disaster**

Rehabilitative and recovery measures are undertaken in an effort to assist the affected to return to normal or near normalcy.

In summary disaster risk management is about identifying prevailing and potential hazards, vulnerabilities as well as taking the necessary measures to build capacity for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Remember our war cry, be a good citizen, reduce the risk to disaster!

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