

A Whole Community Approach to Disaster Management: Preparedness, Involvement, and Empowerment for Action

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ABSTRACT

A constant development and a significant decline of disasters are closely interdependent. Natural disasters, no doubt, are very hostile to the competent development of country. Similarly human made infrastructures many a time become a source of risk during the natural calamities. This is often affirmed by earthquakes, storms and floods that accompany a death toll of hundreds at the collapse of great constructions. Hence disaster management has become a burning issue of the day, inviting the discrete attention of every individual to ensure the human intervention in establishing security aspects and environmental harmony. So a need for a comprehensive analysis and awareness of the issue is inevitable. This approach of disaster management expect the communities at risk to get directly engaged in all possible factors of disaster management like Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness & Response of Recovery. To create an adaptability among the disaster hit native communities it is essential that they must be traced up with an apt knowledge and an increasing awareness of activities and happenings before, during and after the natural hazards. This regards as the most effective approach by which the members of communities at risk are trained to face the hazards with fortitude. This paper discusses in brief, the features, components, disaster management by making an analytical study of disaster hit management.

Keywords: Disaster, Management, Community, Empowerment, Involvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Disasters attack normally an unprepared and uninformed community and the damage goes beyond repair. Sarcastically, several communities remain in the clutches of a sluggish attitude, lack of awareness and preparedness because disasters do not occur often. Anyhow, if communities are prepared for disaster minimised. As per the past records, disaster hit communities are provided with immediate physical and financial help from elsewhere for urgent human needs. This assistance, in fact has affected the timing, reliability, effectiveness and efficiency. These factors are measured in terms of death toll, damage and debris. It has been brought to light that a community based preparedness and planning is essential to make the people of the communities to manage themselves the perilous situation of a post- disaster period. As an individual effort we can educate our families and close relatives how to get through such dangerous situations. But communities can only plan and schedule to work together in group and committees at various levels as zonal groups and preparedness will promote the power and ability of an individual to work for minimising the loss of lives and damage of properties.

Disaster and communities: Disaster threat is surging up throughout the world. If we make a keen analysis, we can perceive that the monetary loss and the number of victimised in the past two four decades are on an alarming increase contrary to the economic development and population growth. The under developed and the developing countries are severely affected as the consequences of the disasters hamper their periodic development process. The aftermath of the disaster create a deep scar on the socio economic conditions, culture, tradition and climate of the communities.

Even though the government and international voluntary organizations have undertaken great ventures to demote the mishap of the disaster and rehabilitate the people, it has been observed that many of the management programmes were unsuccessful because the participation of the local communities in redemptive activities is very poor. So it has become inevitable that an emphasis of disaster management efforts should concentrate on the local community's participation, partnership empowerment and ownership. Unless the local community takes up a committed involvement in the restorative activities, it is impossible to lessen the flow of tragedy.

Rajib Shaw and Kenji Okazaki (2004) when the local communities are provided with opportunities to forge with the government officials and experts, in programming the disaster management activities, they will shoulder up the responsibility of facing the challenges and consequences of disaster. Further it is necessary to devise such involvement of the people, their preparedness, and responsibility into policies and strategies that will result in people's continuous engagement and long term commitment to the disaster management activities. Such a sense of ownership from the local community is absolutely necessary for a successful pre-disaster mitigation and post-disaster response and rehabilitation activities.

Community empowerment: When disasters invade a vast region or a country the consequences are experienced at the native community level though the attack is against one or several communities at the same time. These communities form what is called "Disaster fronts". Such communities which face disasters openly should possess capacity to tackle the challenges that frighten their very survival. Hence it is insisted that such communities should involve in disaster management process Eileen E. Brady and John F. Guido (1988).

Very often various community confidence – building programmes associated with disaster mitigation though achieved the objectives, it remains only for a short period and the issue of viability and feasibility are not analysed

precisely. Although the government, both the non-government intra and international voluntary organisations execute several programmes before and after the hazards, the success of it prolongs only up to the project years in full swing but gradually melts away as years pass by. Many reasons can be adduced for this disadvantage but the major being the lack of effective participation, and capacity building of local communities and lack of their knowledge in disaster management programmes Sally A. Buchanan (1988).

Indeed, governments are chiefly responsible to execute the disaster managing procedures, utilizing all possible resources of the area. In earlier days government adopted a top- down and a command- and – control approaches to manage the consequences of the hazards. According to this approach decisions and strategies will be decreed by authorities based on their wisdom and insight of the timely needs. The communities, rather the victims should accept the aid and directions. It has been proved good at times but it has failed to meet the exact and basic needs of the affected. This system has increased the need for unnecessary external resources and brings in a general dissatisfaction over the implementation in spite of the inclusion many exceptional management measures. It is because, the community that has felt the impact directly is neither given a chance to take part in the decision making nor in setting the strategies nor in administering the activities. At the same time if the community is left on its own accord to meet the disasters it will also produce disadvantageous outcome.

Claire England and Evans Karen (1988) in many developing and underdeveloped countries the people who suffer the most at the hands of hazards are economically unsound, possess very limited provisions for the survival, have little access to social support and own insufficient infrastructure. Hence community empowerment for disaster management commands the community's participation in risk assessment, mitigation planning, capacity building implementation of the measures and monitoring the primitive system all which promises their restored survival.

Community based disaster management: From the observation, we recognize the demerits of command-and-control or top –down approach namely the absence of community participation that neglected the vital humanitarian needs, unnecessary demand for external means and general dissatisfaction in the implementation. Hence it is affirmed that the Community Based Disaster Management approach only can promote a bottom up structure in collaboration with top –down method in confronting the challenges and difficulties. To make this approach effective local community should be assisted and enabled to make a self analysis of their own vulnerabilities and their deplorable conditions on par with their abilities Mary-Lou E. Florian (1997).

In times of natural calamities the native community level people, major or minor, have to lose a lot as they are struck directly and the first to expose their vulnerability the disastrous occasions. At the same time they are to benefit the most if the disasters are minimised in their community Griffith J.W (1983). This attitude gave birth to the idea of Community Based Disaster Management through which the people are supplied with capacities to make use of all the available resources and basic social services and so they are empowered to respond quickly to emergencies. Community – based approach to managing disasters definitely its own merits. The Community Based Disaster Management the native communities are energised to undertake any primitive measure of progress including the disaster management activities Klaus B. Hendriks and Brian Lesser (1983).

The Community Based Disaster Management approach provides the local community with chances for an initial assessment of its own predicament from their past experiences. In this approach the local community besides being a part of scheduling plans and strategies, it becomes the chief executor of the implementations process Allen and Katrina M. (2006). Simultaneously it opens wide the importance of scientific and objective risk assessment and planning. This approach encompasses as many as contributors to be involved in the process of gaining capacities and promoting the resources in the native community so as to assume the greatest responsibility of fighting against disasters and serving to rehabilitate.

Need for community involvement: The primary intention of community involvement is the sustainability of local community for disaster reduction. External organisations like both government and non – government agencies can activate and implement community level programs before and after the natural calamities. But this may not last long as the local community stays away from the process of activities. There are many factors that inhibit the sustainability like lack of participation, empowerment, partnership and ownership of local communities. Unless the disaster management activities are carried out by native individuals and the local community it will be very hard to minimise the losses and vulnerability. It is therefore essential to incorporate the native people in decision making on strategies and policies that ensure a constant progress in the community Anderson, W A. (2005).

Disasters can exceed our control and collapse everything if the community is not well informed about the preventive measures to be executed before, during and after the hazards. Of course, if the individual is very conscious of the ways and steps about the disaster management the fatal destruction of the calamity can be considerably reduced.

The native villagers and communities have their own modus operandi to face the disasters. They may be familiar with the foreshadowing signs of the calamities, may be aware of the locally safe and unsafe areas, may possess the know – how of the past disasters, have remarkable social affiliation and have the dexterity of survival in

unfavourable situations. All these are vitally beneficial during the disastrous period at the perilous scenario and they should be taken into account. Native communities have a main role to play before, during and after the natural catastrophe because:

- A great remarkable readiness may minimise the fatal consequences.
- A great number of victims can be redeemed in the few hours of the first phase of post disaster period by direct involvement of local teams.
- A number of problems regarding survival and hygiene of the affected can be treated effectively if the native communities are well informed, active and organized.

Vital evidences are available to point out that top- down disaster risk management programmes have failed to renovate life pattern of the vulnerable communities and in some cases the sufferings are intensified because the native resources, potentialities and capacities are not promptly utilized.

The significance of the Community Based Disaster Management approach gains popularity at present due to the diversified pattern of increasing disastrous occurrences with its fatal results. While colossal disasters continue to occur, a sweeping increase in the happenings of small and medium scale disasters like land slide, drought, flood and fire also occur frequently Carr, Lowell Juilliard. (1932).

2. CONCLUSION

Disasters endanger everyone regardless of discrimination and disparities. It is rightly stated "It is better to prepare and prevent than to repair and repent". Hence community based action plans and trainings develop the skills of solving the crises. Hence Community Based Disaster Management maintains the sustainability with community empowerment and communicative skills. As disaster management projects and awareness about disasters should be well educated. Transparency of activities, imparting apt knowledge and information about disaster management projects encourage people to ensure a satisfied involvement and participation. Since Community Based Disaster Management efforts seek constant financial resources, private sectors also can institutionalize such continuous community based disaster management programmes.

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